



Literary Studies

# Children Literature as A Medium to Foster Critical Thinking: A Systematic Review on Benefit

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## A B S T R A C T

This paper aims to investigate children's literature as a medium to foster critical thinking. This study used a qualitative method with purpose to know the meaning of the phenomena that happen. In this case, problem-solving discussion was applied as a method to deal with the issue. This was done by cross-checking and eclectic review from different sources. Research finding has revealed that children's literature is a great media for ELT young learner's overall language and literacy competence. In particular, children literature dealing with different cultures or social issues can promote intercultural understand and social justice. Children literature is beneficial to fostering critical thinking in language classroom more enjoyable. In short, the young learner begins to create new ideas, motivating them to acquire foreign language, expanding student's awareness, and understanding another culture. They are naturally motivated by questioning and learning that occurs along with other students and guided by the teacher who always encourage them.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Currently, critical thinking is an anxiety increases related to education, especially among educators, especially in how to teach children's literature. Teaching critical thinking through children's literature is still an argument in the sense of doubt about the possibility of being taught to students. Critical thinking has become global because of changes in society that are influenced by the growth of information technology. Teaching Thinking through Children's Literature can liven up the lives of students and their potential as tools in the learning process. Children's literature can work as a way of using personal topics and life experiences as stimulus to develop a critical thinking. In several studies, children's literature has been recognized for its educational contribution, especially to improve students' critical thinking skills. It can also provide good purpose and meaning for young learners to create the level of emotional involvement that teachers have been looking for in the learning process. This research supports the idea that an attractive environment is

critical for young learners' cognitive, emotional, comprehension, and social development.

Children's literature for children began in seventeenth century. Most of the books for children are used to teach the sounds of letter and words, to improve the moral and spiritual value of the child. In the mid-1700s, British publisher John Newberry agreed with John Locke's idea that children should enjoy reading, and started to publish book for children's entertainment. At that time, Children's literature was only used for didactics, which uses to instill moral, spiritual, and ethical values in children to providing literature for entertainment and knowledge. This does not mean that literature suitable for children is immoral. On the other hand children's literature is suitable for children influenced by the cultural and ethical values of the author. These values are often revealed when a literary work is published.

The young learner to reach their learning desire and potential, children's literature allows them to question, discover and actively relate to the knowledge acquired is critical. There are Ellison

(2010), Lee (2011), Law (2012), and Novasyari (2019). Several researchers that they have proven that children's literature brings massive benefits to young students' critical thinking skills in the learning process. For them, children's literature is a medium that can be used suitably and effectively and is known as a means to motivate students, especially young students, to appreciate the language and culture of the language they want to learn. This belief has led to a literature-based reading approach as well as more quality children's literature journals that promote the overall linguistic competence of young learners. It holds belief of interpersonal relationship and cultural aspect in life which can impact on children thoughts.

According to Ellison (2010), has completed his findings revealing that children's picture stories can be used for ages 3 to 4 years and even primary school students. It depends on the child's linguistic stage development. Young learners have a passion for reading books and revisiting or even re-reading different books, reading materials that can facilitate early childhood literacy proficiency. To develop young learner critical thinking, the educator can use stories so they can be natural, familiar and more enjoyable to read their book. If young learners interest with the stories then they tends to enjoy re-telling the story to their mates. To ensure that young learners fully understand to the story, the educators will ask the questions and provide the necessary support for them to answer which will enable young learners to develop their thought.

While Hsiang-Ni Lee (2011), has completed her finding which revealing that children literature is a great media for ESL/EFL young children's language and literacy competence. It distinguishes picture book from picture story books, more visual decoration, and story books play important role in children's reading comprehension. Through children literature, the young learners are given the opportunity to closely examine the potential challenges in certain socio-cultural groups. Critical thinking skills enable them to take further action again discrimination.

In the context of EFL, Children literature is associated with advanced university students or other high level adults. However, children literature is the main part of English language literature as media and its use for teaching EFL has many benefits for young learner. In order to understanding the critical thinking as process, its elements are defined, analyzed, and designated in

terms of classroom behavior. According to Usery (1966), the aims of children's literature as medium for young learner to appreciate and develop the masterpiece in more enjoyable way. Using children literature for develop critical thinking skill is an application of literature that "goes beyond the realm of aesthetics."

According to Barone (2010), children's literature owes its use to genuine language use, engaging story plots and illustrations, children's literature is the best teaching medium to evaluate young learners' motivation to read. Such motivation, as evidenced by many researchers, contributes to the development language and literacy skills. Therefore, to achieve the goal of better education, curriculum needs to offer students skills ability to develop a higher thinking skill since early age. One of the aims of teaching and learning is to foster critical thinking through children's literature. It is believed that the young learner with good critical thinking skills can be better prepared to compete and exercise their right and responsibilities in adult community.

According to the relevant research result that have been presented, such as Novasyari (2019) and Handayani (2013), which use classroom action research, they have more or less the same notions, that children literature in the language teaching and learning process will make a positive contribution to the young learners' language skills. They have led to the perception that applying children literature in approved language classes as valuable and effective in developing the young learners' critical thinking skills. However, the main point that those researchers did not pay considerable attention to is the problems of using children literature. These researchers only focused on the positive impact inherent in children literature without discussing the problems that might arise when children literature applied.

This paper will try to reveal problems that might appear when using children's literature. It provides an overview of the roles and evaluations that are usually considered to decide when children's literature as media to foster the young learners' critical thinking skills. Therefore, it examines the educational benefits of applying children's literature. Secondly, it reveals critical thinking during the use of children literature.

## II. METHOD

This paper summarized Children's literature as

a medium for fostering critical thinking and reviews problems that may arise when applying Children literature as a classroom technique. In addition, this paper also tries to provide a solution to teachers' literacy problems. In this case, problem-solving discussion was applied as a method to deal with the issue. This was done by cross-checking and eclectic review from different sources. Finally, the discussion results were confirmed and evaluated by making the relevant previous studies and research.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Benefit of using children's literature

Educators have been interested in investigating the effectiveness of children's literature for young learner language education. Children need to be prepared to solve problems and develop critical thinking skills. It has been shown to be successful engaging young learners in learning experiences where early literacy and language skill are acquired and practice naturally (Saccardi, 2014). Children's literature also has the best potential to build expand children's knowledge about others people, which encourages cross-cultural awareness. Picture books can be useful resources for opening up conversations about sensitive subjects and therefore encouraging critical literacy. The ultimate optimism is that young learners will be able to act on examples of social injustice in the less-than-perfect world of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. According to Mourao (2013), Children's literature presents a multicultural reflection of social situation towards young learners. Through reading, young learners get to know the norms that exist in society and develop self-identity in accordance with society's expectation, young learners also prepare themselves to solve problems in society and develop their ideas. On the other hand, storybooks can open new window for young learner to access cultural-ethnic group that are usually remote to them. If they wish prepare to challenge 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, young learner can embrace multiple perspectives and develop the social responsibility necessary for necessary communicate and collaborate with others. This cross-cultural awareness does not only inhibit potential for others.

#### Encouraging Critical Thinking skills

Children's literature brings happy and innocent stories, young learner need to be present about the real-life conflicts and problems. Young learners are given the opportunity to carefully observe the environment in which they are in and best prepare

themselves for adulthood. In other word, young learner's critical thinking can defined as the act of seeking the clearest ideas about subject's fact, point of view and observation. Being aware of a situation involves changing the learner's perception of the situation. This is the critical thinking stage where the learner sees a picture of the situation before the young learner moves on to a more complex stage. Analyzing a situation involves separating the factors that make up the total situation so that the elements can be studied singly. Whereas perception indicates a view of the whole, analyzing suggests a view of the parts. According to Hunt (1998) , there are thress levels of analysis : identifying and classifying elements, noting the relationships and interactions between elements, and recognizing arrangements and structures. Young learners draw a broad understanding of the situation (Saccardi, 2014).

Appropriately guided by teachers, social issue books as well help children recognize and possibly challenge any framing of certain social-cultural group in pre-test. The young leaners are able to generate a thoughtful discussion on hate crimes. They are be able to use logical and creative thought to judge, their ability to take a critical attitude on social issues which enables them to take further action against injustice. Meanwhile, According to Nikolajeva (2014), Children literature plays in developing children critical thinking through image or picture. Children's literature provides an image of children's every life, an image of their feeling and problems around them. It will affect their knowledge and belief toward the story. The most effective way to cultivate critical thinking through children's literature allows young learners to connect concepts and ideas as they create new schemas. Learning experiences such as the following using children's literature focus on the types of critical thinking behavior that young learner use when they become aware of a situation. Through children's literature young learners can explain to their peers the inner feelings they experienced after reading the texts. The teacher can encourage student's reading engagement through interactive and critical class discussions.

Young learners can develop multiple perspectives and affect their mins. When sharing or challenging one another's ideas, young learners are most likely to develop a deeper understanding of as well as interest in the text (Hunt & Ray, 1996). Each text carries specific perspectives and moral



value to the young learner. So, these can inspire to have better personalities. The totality of the learning experience should include a means for determining whether the learners are progressing in the development of their critical thinking skills. It also improves their qualities of human being such as empathy, sympathy, honesty and kindness. The key to developing critical thinking is support young learners' natural curiosity, the educator serves as "facilitators" and "guides".

Children who have early opportunities to interact with good literature are more enjoyable to spend their time to read at school rather than those who do not. The role of parents who introduced their child to reading books since they were born often brings big influence for their children's literacy. During the pre-school, books contribute to the structure of child's language skills; children discover concrete meaning-making and acquire critical thinking (Mourao, 2013). Through children's literature, young learners motivate to master reading skills. Language teachers play an important role in the effectiveness of critical thinking development. This finding is supported by Barone (2011), that young learners in particular need an active classroom and variety during the lesson. The young learner needs to stimulate their emotional responses, allow individual interpretations as well as encourage critical reflection.

However, the teacher should choose materials that are linguistically appropriate and the original socio-cultural portrait. Language teachers need to provide sustained practices in developing students' awareness of reading as personal, enjoyable, and meaningful so they do not sacrifice the power of providing picture books. Strategies include encouraging individual responses and critical discussions.

Teacher can simply start the conversation by asking for students' opinion concerning the reading material and how their feelings relate to their own life experiences. Teacher can appreciate their responses toward the reading text and spread the students to discuss in pairs or small groups. Young learners may not be fully aware of the wide range of quality children literature. It is crucial that language teachers carefully select texts which deal with different themes and match students' current reading level (Teranishi et al., 2015). The young learners are able to make meaning-making through visual texts, but they also think critically about the meanings presented. It shows young learners

were able to link their experiences and make new knowledge toward interpreting images in particular ways.

Related to Law (2012) Children are naturally motivated by provocative questions and learning that occurs along with other children and guided by the teacher who encourages them to continually ask "why", this is the sign that the young learners start to investigate, try to make predictions, ask questions, and try to create new ideas and thoughts. They spend time discussing and uncovering interesting information and reflecting on the information. From the new schema, young learners begin to ask more questions.

The teacher observes, scaffolds and documents the process of young learners learning. However, the teacher should carefully select items that allow for inquiry to occur. The teacher's belief reflected in children's literature as a medium to foster critical thinking, providing critical instruction to guide the young learners in learning activities. Critical questions given by the teacher are showing how does the teacher guide the young learners to extend their ideas and encourage them by questioning how or why to the young learners when they give a short answer. To gain rich information from the young learners, the teacher should begin to ask them "how do you know that it has?" the language teacher should elaborate the learner's answer further and give relevant information to the concept of accuracy. The challenge is to be aware of young learners' interest and provide items that support their senses and encourage them to read carefully, discover new things and create new knowledge.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

This research finding has revealed that children's literature is a great media for ELT young learners' overall language and literacy competence. In particular, children's literature dealing with different cultures or social issues can promote intercultural understanding and social justice. Children's literature is beneficial to fostering critical thinking in language classrooms more enjoyable. In short, the young learner begins to create new ideas, motivating them to acquire foreign language, expanding student's awareness, and understanding another culture. They are naturally motivated by questioning and learning that occurs along with other students and guided by the teacher who always encourages them.

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