"A loyal friend, even when storms descend" An Analysis of Students' Critical Views on Media Development through their Poems

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Abstract

The study aims to explore students' critical views on the development of media, especially television and radio, through their poems. The respondents were 17 students attending Introduction to Pop Culture course. Utilizing Hanauer's meaningful literacy concept (2012) this qualitative case study investigated respondents' perceptions towards media development and its impacts. Major themes found in the study showed that students expressed (1) nostalgia with the media (2) critical views of the content of the media (3) Media as the source of comfort and connection (4) disillusionment with the media, and (5) media evolution and its impact. This study also highlighted the possibilities of integrating literature, especially poem, in the language classrooms in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to encourage students' critical thinking.

Keywords: media, pop culture, critical thinking, EFL

INTRODUCTION

This study aims to explore students' critical views on the development of media through their poems. Seventeen students in the Introduction to Popular Culture class were involved in this study. It is one of the courses offered in English literature department in the university where the authors teach. This course is designed to introduce students with the development of Popular culture and the

issues following that progress. The course also aims to help students use their language skills to learn specific subject matter. Santos and Nanquil (2023) argued that with pop culture as a catalyst of interaction, teachers provide more opportunities for the learners to use the knowledge of their own interests and relate these to the elements of literature they discuss.

The topics discussed in the course include the development of printing, radio, television and cinema. Those media are believed to shape human's culture and impact our life. Barthes in Danesi (2015) believed that media is the message that has certain characteristics that shape themselves and their users. Beside getting information, education, and entertainment, media can lead to trends that influence the way people live. The impact of the advancement of the media can be positive and negative. Students in this course were expected to be knowledgeable and critical towards the phenomena.

Although Pop Culture had been underused and underinvestigated in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Classroom, it can be a catalyst for learning and a vehicle of various other instructional content (Werner & Tegge, 2021). In Pop Culture classroom, students are given opportunity to discuss, analyse and interpret diverse cultural artefact and phenomena. Duff and Zappa-Hollman (2013) stated that learning about and participating in pop culture consumption, production, and critique is an important part of language learning and socialization into new cultures. Students can get immerse in the discussion while using language they have learned.

One important finding in Pierson-Smith, et al (2014) for example showed that Pop Culture class develops students' abilities to analyse issues in their everyday lives more critically in terms of power relations and cross-cultural differences and to make sense of their lived experiences in a rapidly globalizing, digitized world.

An opportunity to be able to express their perspectives toward specific issues in personal way is crucial to cultivate critical thinking. A study by Kasprabowo, et al. (2023) scrutinized the use of poem in Creative Writing class to produce personal, contextual, and meaningful expressions of the students. This means that they are given opportunity to perceive certain issue through their poem and respond to it. By doing so, students not only express their ideas critically but also include their emotions. This latter aspect is often neglected though, in fact, very crucial.

In line with the above idea, Rashtchi and Khoshnevisan (2020) argued that critical thinking needs to be cultivated as it is not something that is natural to the students. Teachers, therefore, are required to adopt appropriate strategies and classroom practices to facilitate students with their critical thinking. To achieve the goal, they employed dialog, cooperative learning and organizational skills in the study.

Among many creative and analytical tools and strategies, poetry has potential as a medium to promote critical thinking. Therefore, this fits especially for language learners with literature as their major. Poetry can be one of the alternative tools to foster their critical thinking. By utilizing poetry in responding the development of media, they are expected to practice their English as well as to be critical. It can be said that this study covers three major field namely Pop Culture, language use in EFL context in the form of poetry and critical thinking. Rosenhan and Galloway (2019) explained that poetry writing developed creative writing skills, individual voice and confidence as language users.

The use of poetry in classroom has been implemented in various classrooms such as in emotional therapy (Iida, 2016),

social work profession (Furman, et al., 2018), reflective practice in nursing education (Deliligka & Caldglou, 2022), health therapy (Mundy, 2022) and reflective practice in Creative Writing class (Kasprabowo, 2023).

In order to be critical and to use the language they have learned while discussing certain subject in Popular culture, students need to be encouraged to think beyond their own boundaries. A study from Lin (2019) showed that poetry improved students critical thinking in terms of personalised learning and space exploration. That means students get an opportunity to invent personal responses and to be open with new ideas they have never thought before.

In addition to the above idea, a study conducted by Norton and Gregson (2020) explained that sharing stories and poems helped students to develop their social and cultural capital. Also, it supported their critical thinking and academic engagement. Meanwhile Hughes (2007) explained Poetry awakens our senses, helps us make connections to others, and leads us to think in synthesizing ways, as required by the use of metaphor. In this study, critical thinking is considered as a skill to respond to real phenomena. Therefore, it needs to be trained or practiced. One of the ways is through writing poetry in response to specific issues.

The development of television and radio is a very interesting topic to discuss as they are closely related to the students' daily life. Therefore, it is expected that the students can articulate their voice about the progress of the media. According to Hanauer (2012) learning a language should allow students to participate in meaningful, contextualized, and individualized activities. Thus, encouraging meaningful and personal expression should be the aim of language acquisition. This method can help students have a deeper grasp of the language and culture they are learning in addition to improving their language ability. Language

learning can become more interesting and fulfilling if they are given the opportunity to express themselves meaningfully. Poetry can help students accomplish this aim by enabling them to express themselves in a meaningful and personal way and by using language creatively.

This study looked at how students perceived television and radio development by first looking at the history of the progress, then relate it to their personal experiences. The use of poetry is considered suitable as they are majoring in English literature. Through poetry they can also get the opportunity to use English as the language they learn during their study. In addition, they can express their emotions to contextualized and individualized the meaning they tried to convey.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative case study involved 17 students of an English Literature Department of a private university in Indonesia. They attended the Introduction to Pop Culture course. The course facilitated students with the history and the development of media such as printing, radio, television, and cinema. There were 16 meetings during one semester. In the second-half of the semester the students were introduced how to write simple poetry by reflecting on their experiences. This was conducted in the last five meetings. As they are majoring in literature, they had previously learned poetry in the previous semesters. This helped the researcher to conduct this study. At the end of the course, students wrote poetry reflecting their experiences towards television and/ or radio. The poems were composed in free verses so that they had more freedom in expressing their ideas. They were required to express how they thin, feel and perceive television and radio according to their experiences.

To lessen the pressure of poetry writing which usually considered difficult. The researchers suggested that the students may use plain English if they wished. This is because poems in this study was intended as a way to communicate the students' idea. Therefore, the poems should be created in such way that they could be easily understood by the readers. Also, students were given time to discuss their poems with the researchers and to do revisions when necessary.

The researchers used Hanauer's (2012) idea of meaningful literacy to examine the data. Writing to respond certain phenomena related to personal experiences is part of meaningful literacy. Other aspects of meaningful literacy include in this study were: (1) a reflective process done by the students in regards of their connections with TV/ Radio to gain understanding of personal experiences; (2) eliciting emotional reactions towards the experiences; and (3) situating poetry writing within a social context where the students and other people may understand and feel about TV and/or radio.

To keep their personal identity, the students as the participants in this study were coded with "R" followed by a number instead of their real name, for example, Student 1 was coded as R1, student 2 was coded R2, and so on.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Result
To analyze the students' perspectives on media as reflected in their poems, based on Hanauer's meaningful literacy concept (2012) the researcher categorized their viewpoints into distinct patterns. We also provide citations from the poems and explain why each citation fits into a specific category. Each poem could fall into multiple categories. However, we assigned a poem to a category only once. Therefore, each shared the same percentage of around 23.5%.

The major themes are categorized in (1) Nostalgia with the media (2) critical views of the content of the media (3) Media as the source of comfort and connection (4) disillusionment with the media, and (5) media evolution and its impact.

Nostalgia with the media
Most students express a sense of nostalgia for the traditional forms of media, particularly television and radio. This category captures their longing for the past, where media played a more significant and positive role in their lives. It can be seen in the following lines from the respondents:

R#11
Television has used to accompany my day.
From morning to evening, it always accompanied me without stopping.
That used to be a friend when mom was busy working.
Kept me company when I was afraid to be home alone.
It made me laugh and drove away boredom.

The above verse described television used to be a good friend for R#1. The lines expressed the memory of childhood moment in which he perceived television in a positive way. Television for a child seemed be a perfect company in many different situations.

R#15:
I recall the time when the screen lit up,
We gathered and sat before it,
With a sweet curve adorned our faces,
Things to sip and munch on in our hands,
And excitement rushed all over our beings.

Meanwhile R#15 looked at television not only as media for entertainment but also a place for the family time. Still, he perceived television in a positive way. In front of the television, in the past, the family could get together and had fun.

R#14:
What a wonderful medium,
Who accompanied our childhood.
Starting from a black and white screen,
Becomes a screen full of rich colors.

The above verse by R#14 showed the same description as that by R#11. In addition, she also observed the development of television. One of them was the shift of black and white TV to color one. This added excitement that she experienced.

R#9:
The villager still finds calm in his rays,
A constant companion, a familiar show.
A reflection of life, a wheel that keeps turning.

The above line by R#9 tried to describe television from the eye of the community where the respondent grew. People enjoyed television programs and keep them as their regular friend.

        Just like other verses, this one also perceived television in a good and positive way.

        The verses showed a fond memory of television as a constant companion, especially during childhood. They evoked nostalgia for the days when television was eagerly anticipated and played a central role in family life. They captured a sense of nostalgia, reflecting on the evolution of television from simpler times to a more colorful and vibrant experience that accompanied the respondent's childhood. The last verse (R#9) reflected the comfort and familiarity television provided in the past, especially in rural areas, suggesting a longing for simpler times.

Critical View of Media Content
In contrast with the above category, some students critique the quality and content of modern media, particularly television, highlighting how it has deteriorated over time and often promotes negative or shallow content. This can be seen in the following verses:

R#8:
Nowadays many tv programs are boring
and only make stupid people famous.
When I'm finally awaken, I'm angry at myself,
as I've missed my favorite shows.
I was able to see the beginning, how it ended.

R#17:
Through event whispers of the past
From innocent cartoons to dramas
Now, in the present, a chaotic array
Bad programs overshadow the nostalgic display

R#16:
The night is accompanied by the sound of crickets as cheerleaders.
I purchased a pair of wings
in order to go through the night and into your dreams.
The night is over here.
People crammed into coffee shops
to hear sermons read aloud on television and in newspapers.

R# 11:
There were so many shows that made me happy.
Like Spongebob, Larva, Sofia the First, Paw Patrol, and Pororo.
My mom said those shows are good for kids.
But now, it's hard to find them on any channel.

These verses reflected a critical stance toward contemporary TV content, suggesting that it lacks value and promotes superficiality. The students showed dissatisfaction with the current state of

television, contrasting it with the more cherished programs of the past. They also critiqued the repetitive and harmful nature of some television content, suggesting that it perpetuates negative emotions and experiences. Finally, the students highlighted disappointment with the current programming on television, particularly the lack of quality movies and the abundance of unappealing soap operas.

Media as a Source of Comfort and Connection

Some poems reflect how media, especially radio, provides emotional comfort and a sense of connection, particularly in moments of solitude or hardship.

R#6:
In every memory, woven together,
As beautiful as a rainbow, as fierce as a stormy weather,
Radio never breaks its vow,
Like the everlasting edelweiss, like the faithful purple hue.

In every teardrop, countless they fall,
Carrying joy and sorrow, embracing all,
Radio remains a loyal friend,
Even when storms descend.

R#1:
Affection is just an illusion
slow heartbeat without emotion
I entered a quiet corner of the room
the room is contained, neat but not maintained
what I saw was like a magic box
like abstract in art
when you are sad
you are my source of information

R# 4:
Like a messenger in the middle of the silent night,

who continues to voice their presence even though it is considered quiet."

R#13:
The radio will stay on as an everlasting light in my heart and all other listeners' hearts."

This verse by R#6 personified the radio as a dependable friend, offering solace during tough times. It was important to highlight here that radio could endure hard times as well. R#4 and R#13 personifies the radio as a comforting presence during lonely or quiet times, reinforcing its role as a source of emotional support. Radio was depicted as a constant and enduring source of comfort, deeply valued by all respondent.

Disillusionment with the media

This category captures students' disillusionment with how media, particularly television, has evolved, often leading to a sense of alienation or disappointment.

R#5
Their promotions discourse,
their consumer's song of praise,
their poisonous echoes of desires inside

R#10:
You've lost your touch, trade it with nothing but a toxic and corruption

These above two verses criticized how modern television promotes consumerism and manipulates desires, leading to disillusionment. The poem reflected a sense of betrayal and loss, suggesting that television, once a source of joy, had become tainted and harmful. The news for example only broadcasted cases related to corruption and other crimes.

R#7:
The broadcasts that were shown began to be uninteresting.
But I only said that to myself.

These verses reflected a personal disillusionment with the content being aired on television, which the respondent finds increasingly dull and unengaging. While recognizing the influence of television, this line suggested a critical perspective on how television had changed over time, perhaps not always for the better.

Critical View of Media Content
Some students critique the quality and content of modern media, particularly television, highlighting how it has deteriorated over time and often promotes negative or shallow content.

R#8:
Nowadays many tv programs are boring and only make stupid people famous

R#17:
Now in the present a chaotic array, bad programs overshadow the nostalgic display.

R#11:
But now it's hard to find a great movie. I find so many uninteresting soap operas.

The above lines reflected a critical stance toward contemporary TV content, suggesting that it lacked value and promotes superficiality. The respondents showed dissatisfaction with the current state of television, contrasting it with the more cherished programs of the past. They critiqued the repetitive and harmful nature of some television content, suggesting that it perpetuates negative emotions and experiences. All lines highlighted disappointment with the current programming on television, particularly the lack of quality program such as good movies. Instead, they only found the abundance of unappealing program such as soap operas.

Discussion
The above findings proved that the students got immersed in the topic being discussed in the Introduction to Pop Culture course. they did not only try to understand the development television and radio but also related the phenomena with their personal experiences. This is in line with the concept of meaningful literacy by Hanauer (2012). In language classrooms, students should be given opportunity to express their personal meaning that involve their emotion as well.

This study also showed that there are possibilities to integrate different aspects in language classrooms, in this case the integration of the course, the use of language, and literature. Studies by Khatib and Nourzadeh (2011), Kaslioglu and Ersin (2018), Sharma et al (2022) and Kilag et al (2023) proposed similar idea.

CONCLUSION
The study captured the range of students' perspectives in responding to the development of different media. Both positive and negative perceptions towards the media were expressed in such a way that demonstrated the students' knowledge and experiences. Students conveyed their joy and disappointment not only in meaningful but also beautiful way. This should happen in language classrooms. This study also showed the possibilities to integrate different aspects in language classrooms. The exploration of the interplay between language learning, critical thinking, and media studies in this study could be an important consideration for future research.

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