

A Case Study of Critical Reading in Action with Korean University Students in an EFL Context

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This case study aimed to examine ways Korean university students in an English critical reading class participated in educational action projects. For this purpose, the reading class was designed to enhance students' critical thinking skills and global citizenship as readers. Eighteen students in the class were taught by the teacher how to read texts in English using a critical perspective. The reading class was managed in a flexible mode with comprehension check-ups, critical dialoguing, and student-initiated action. Students were invited to connect what they discussed to action outcomes as a group project. Students in groups presented their understanding of readings and what they discussed in critical dialogues of the readings. They then reported what they did outside the classroom to foster themselves as truly active citizens in their local circumstances. Their group reports and project products were collected and analyzed into themes using qualitative methods. It was revealed that critical dialogue activities could help students come up with action-provoking questions on the readings, bring about a variety of action outcomes resulting from collaborations in groups, and help students become more active readers and citizens. Educational implications are also discussed.

Key words: critical reading, dialogue, action outcomes, active citizens

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the goals of critical pedagogy is to develop global citizenship and raise the critical consciousness of learners, and in this sense, there have been assertions that critical pedagogy is hardly present in Asian educational systems. Teachers in Asia often doubt and even deny applying critical pedagogy in their own teaching context largely because they

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think they should follow traditional school systems and critical pedagogy is not appropriate for their cultures. According to Kubota (1999), however, these are misrepresentation of Asian cultures. Crookes (2013) reports that a critical approach to teaching English as a Foreign Language (hereafter, EFL) is “possible and do-able in all parts of the world, in South America, South Africa, Europe and East Asia” (p. 146), and there also have been a few reports of the application of critical EFL pedagogy in different educational systems in Asia; to name a few, Korea (Huh & Suh, 2018; Shin & Crookes, 2005a, 2005b; Suh & Huh, 2014, 2017), Hong Kong (Wong, Chan, & Firkins, 2006), Japan (Konoeda & Watanabe, 2008), Singapore (Kramer-Dahl, 2001; Kwek, Albright, & Kramer-Dahl, 2007), and Iran (Ghahremani-Ghajar & Mirhosseini, 2005; Izadina & Abednia, 2010). Huh and Suh (2018) reported the effectiveness of critical reading instruction to promote global intercultural citizenship with Korean elementary students, and Suh and Huh (2014, 2017) reported that critical reading instruction helped university students become not only strategic readers but also better readers in comprehending texts in English.

It is important to actually participate and take action for social change in critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy can help students not only address their present situation but also encourages them to participate in democratic processes to change society in the direction of equity and justice for all (Crookes, 2013). Critical pedagogy teachers, therefore, need to guide their students to become more active and engaged democratic citizens, ultimately seeking out solutions to the problems they identify and taking actions. In this sense, several scholars examined the role of social movements (Anyon, 2005; 2009a, 2009b; Tilly, 2003, 2004) and associated educational social movements (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Swain, 2005) in implementing a critical pedagogy in various countries. Any social movement can be formal (voting), informal (writing to a representative, taking part in a march or protest), within an institution (complaining about a teacher or course) or a political entity (a city, a county, a state) (Crookes, 2013, p. 191). Interestingly enough regarding the applicability of participatory critical pedagogy outside the classroom, there has been little research of ESL contexts (Benesch, 1999; Ferguson, 1998; Flowerdew, 2005, *inter alia*), even less so in Asian EFL contexts.

To fill the knowledge gap, this study aims to report connections between critical pedagogy in a reading class and participatory action outcomes from students in an EFL context in Korea. The research purpose of this study is to explore how Korean university students in an English critical reading class participated in educational action projects and how it helped them develop their criticality and active citizenship. With this purpose, the following specific research questions were adopted:

1. How did the students come up with action-provoking reflections and/or questions on the readings?

2. What did they do outside the classroom to foster themselves as active citizens in their local contexts?
3. How did participating in educational action projects help students grow as readers and citizens?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Critical Dialogue and Critical Consciousness in Critical Pedagogy

Dialogue is a very important element of critical pedagogy practice and theory (Auerbach & Wallerstein, 1987; Crookes, 2013; Freire, 2000; Shor, 1992; Wallerstein, 1983; among others). Freire (2000, p. 92) says, “Only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking. Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education.” The goal of dialogue is “critical thinking and action” (Auerbach & Wallerstein, 1987, p. 1). One of the teachers’ roles in classroom practice is then to develop the dialogic talent of students and “dialogue transforms the teacher’s unilateral authority by putting limits on his or her dominating voice and calling on students to co-develop a joint learning process” (Shor, 1992, p. 90). Teachers should encourage interactions among students as well as between teacher and student(s) in their critical pedagogy practice.

With the difference between dialogue and discussion, Shin and Crookes (2005b) distinguished between general dialogical and group interaction and critical dialogue. According to them, general dialogical and group interaction is broadly equivalent to discussion, whereas “critical dialogue refers to interaction, both between teacher and student and among students, in which one person’s language, whether a statement or question, encourages or presses another to consider the basis for their thinking” (Readapted from Crookes, 2013, p. 64). This idea of critical dialogue corresponds to Freire’s, “through critical dialogue, students come to name the world in a way that could lead to the world being changed” (ibid.).

On the other hand, critical consciousness, or conscientization, is one of the main goals to be attained in critical pedagogy (Crookes, 2013; Freire, 1985; Ratner, 2000; Roberts, 1996; Torres, 1994; among others). According to Freire (1985, p. 106), conscientization is “the process by which human beings participate critically in a transforming act.” Roberts (1996) connects the concept of conscientization with that of praxis, the synthesis of reflection and action and says, “Being critically conscious implies a continuous process of transformation” (Roberts, 1996, p. 193). Crookes (2013, p. 108) also says, “Conscientization occurs in the transforming moment where critical reflection is

synthesized with action.” In this way, much research claims that critical consciousness development is a necessary part of critical language pedagogy, and it connects with reflection, action and transformation (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Janks, 2010).

2.2. Critical Pedagogy and Action Outcomes

Some research on critical pedagogy claims that it is important to make connections between an element of critical pedagogy and action outcomes (Benesch, 1999; Cowhey, 2006; Crookes, 2013; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Ferguson, 1998; Flowerdew, 2005; Freire, 1996; Janks, 2010; Oylar, 2011; among others). Fostering active citizenship by participating and taking actions is one of the goals of critical pedagogy. It might be challenging for a teacher to implement critical pedagogy with action outcomes in his or her course, and many researchers agree that the outcomes don't have to be revolutionary. In other words, critical pedagogy may result in participating in educational and social movements to change society, creating pedagogy of resistance (Freire, 1996). However, action outcomes can be simple and not particularly visible, but they still suggest the possibility of making change in local circumstances (Crookes, 2013).

Cowhey (2006) conducted research on learning through activism in local contexts and described a range of actions she did inside and outside the classroom. In her critical pedagogy class with elementary students, the students prepared and delivered Thanksgiving food to homeless people and wrote a letter to the mayor. In Ferguson (1998), community college ESL students wrote to legislators and went to a legislator's office to ask for funding for their program. Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) reported how an urban high school in the US brought their ideas into the curriculum and changed educational policy for student rights in California. Flowerdew (2005) reported a case of the possibility of making change by taking action in an EAP course in Hong Kong. A group of biology majors wanted more compulsory Mandarin courses and the professor promised to raise the issue with the university administration. In Benesch (1999), ESL students who experienced critical pedagogy in a psychology class exercised their rights to give the professor feedback about issues they were concerned with in the class such as his lecturing. In Janks (2010), action outcomes in critical pedagogy can be understood as transformation in reconstruction or redesign, and several studies of transformative practices were introduced including action (writing a letter to the librarian) on problems that children identified (no vegetarian food) (Vasquez, 2004) and a tree project (Comber, Thomson, & Well, 2001). As reviewed, it is hard to find participatory studies of critical pedagogy in EFL contexts, and this study tried to make connections between critical reading pedagogy and action outcomes with Korean university students.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This study was designed as a qualitative case study (Merriam, 2009) to explore the ways college students in an English critical reading class critically reflected on the issues they read about and participated in educational action projects as active readers and citizens. Qualitative research is conducted when a problem or issue needs to be explored and when we need complex, detailed understanding of the issue. In this sense, this study benefited well from a qualitative approach. Students' reading activities including reflections, questions and action outcomes are important tools for analysis of this study.

3.2. Participants

The participants of this study were students of a university in Incheon, Korea. The university has eleven colleges and over 20,000 students attend the university. For the spring semester of 2018, eighteen students (eight male students and ten female students) in an education college took the three-credit hour course titled "Advanced English Reading" taught by the researcher. It was an elective course and most of the students were juniors majoring in education, social science education, and English education. Their English proficiency levels were intermediate to low-advanced according to their high-stake English test scores (TOEIC average of 710 from the eleven students who took the Test of English for International Communication) or their letter grade from a mandatory English course (A and B for the students who did not take the TOEIC exam). One female was an international student from China, two female students attended either an international high school in Korea or a junior-high school abroad for a year, and three of the students had experience living abroad for short periods of time (less than 6 months) for English language learning or as exchange students.

3.3. Teaching Procedure and Data Collection

Based on the research, one of the instructional goals of this study is to help students enhance citizenship as active readers with critical consciousness. The students in the class were taught how to read texts in English using a critical perspective and were encouraged to take actions outside the classroom, reporting back what they did in group presentations. The teacher selected reading topics on gender roles and race because they are usually used in critical literacy classes and "critical teachers are willing to take the risk of introducing topical themes, because student conversation and thought often do not include important

issues in society” (Shor, 1992, p. 56). The teacher also asked students of this study whether they had opportunities to read about the topics in other college classes, and few had such experiences in reading articles on the topics and responded positively to reading about them.

To get students familiar with reading using a critical perspective, the teacher had them read and do exercises in Part 8 Critical Reading in *Advanced Reading Power 4* (Jeffries & Mikulecky, 2014) for weeks 1-3 of the semester. Then, for weeks 4-7, the teacher used four readings from different resources on gender roles and race and guided the students to read texts critically. They were also invited to think about questions that they came up with about the issues and what might they do regarding the issues. In other words, the class was managed in stages in a flexible manner as follows: comprehension check-ups, critical dialoging practice and student-initiated action.

During the first half of the semester, the students were not asked to do any actions or present action outcomes for the readings. In this teacher modeling period, they practiced critical reading guided by the teacher. The teacher introduced how to understand and read texts critically using the given texts on gender roles and race with several critical questions on the writer’s intention, purpose, and cultural value. The students were then encouraged to talk about the readings and the issues using critical questions in addition to talking about the readings and the issues freely.

For the second half of the semester, the students in groups were invited to play more active roles as readers. More specifically, they were asked to select readings on gender roles and race (See Appendices A and B for student reading resources). For the reading selection, the teacher, provided them with guidelines: 1) The readings should be connected to the topic (gender roles and race), 2) the article should not be more than three pages, and the students should use reliable reading resources, and 3) the students should consider the difficulty level of the readings (not too easy and not too difficult for the class). For weeks 9-12, each group presented their understanding of the readings and discussed the readings using critical questions. For weeks 13-14, they reported what action-provoking reflections and questions about the readings they came up with as well as what they did outside the classroom after reading the materials in group to foster themselves as truly active citizens in their local circumstance. The reading class was mediated in English by the teacher. The students were encouraged to express themselves in English in the class, but they could present what they discussed either in Korean or in English. Most groups presented in Korean, and excerpts used in the findings section were translated into English. Table 1 summarizes the data-collection procedure of the class.

TABLE 1
Brief Summary of Teaching Procedure

Week	Teaching Procedure	Teacher's Roles/Students' Roles
1-3	Warm-up	Introducing how to read texts critically/Understanding and reading texts critically
4-7	Teacher modeling and student practice	Modeling and guiding critical reading/Understanding and reading texts critically of the given texts on gender roles and race
9-10	Student-directed reading on gender roles	Facilitator/Choosing readings on gender roles, presenting discussion results of comprehension and critical questions of the topic
11-12	Student-directed reading on race	Facilitator/Choosing readings on race, presenting discussion results of comprehension and critical questions of the topic
13	Student-initiated action presentation on gender roles	Facilitator (English-mediated)/Reporting action-provoking reflections on gender roles in class (English or Korean); action-involved activity outside the classroom (Korean); presenting action outcomes in class (English or Korean)
14	Student-initiated action presentation on race	Facilitator (English-mediated)/Reporting action-provoking reflections on race in class (English or Korean); action-involved activity outside the classroom (Korean); presenting action outcomes in class (English or Korean)

In terms of data collection, adapting from the ideas of using critical dialogue in classroom practice, the students in the classroom of this study were encouraged to dialogue critically in pairs and during small-group work and the teacher used their critical dialogue in pair and group work as the primary data source. The action outcomes were also an important data source to be collected. For this study, the students' group reports and action outcomes as project products in weeks 13-14 were collected and analyzed into themes using qualitative methods.

3.4. Data Analysis

The students' presentations of the readings were audio-recorded with the permission of the class, and artifacts as action products were collected. In addition, the student groups were asked to report what they struggled with while taking the course and what they learned. The teacher's observations and note-takings were also used as data.

Since the audio-recorded presentations and the artifacts were the main data resources, thematic analysis was used to analyze the data (Patton, 2015). All the recordings were transcribed, and the researcher read the transcriptions several times to categorize them into themes corresponding to the research questions. For example, with the first research

question, ‘How did the students come up with action-provoking reflections and/or questions of the readings?’, the researcher first read the transcriptions of the groups’ presentations and coded students’ words with the research question in mind. Twelve data sets in total (six for gender roles and six for race) were read and analyzed by the researcher, and the results of initial opening coding of each data set compared to one another repeatedly and the themes and subthemes emerged. The students’ responses of the class, the teacher’s observations and notes were also analyzed for the research questions. To ensure the reliability and validity of this study, the researcher asked a colleague, a qualitative researcher, to analyze two data sets of each topic and cross-checked the results of the data sets. Table 2 summarizes the emerged themes and subthemes with each research question.

TABLE 2
Emerg ed Themes from the Research Questions

Research Questions	Themes and Subthemes
1. Ways of coming up with action-provoking questions of the readings on gender roles and race	Participating in critical dialogue activities led students to think about the issues in their local contexts. Student-initiated reflections were the basis of the action outcomes.
2. Action project outcomes for the readings on gender roles and race	A variety of participatory and creative action outcomes resulting from collaborations in groups: editing, e-mailing (writing-based), survey, stickers (number-based), making a game, video clips (activity-based), lesson planning (school-based)
3. Ways of growing as active readers and citizens	Becoming more confident at selecting an article Being more actively engaged in their reading Being more aware of the issues and taking actions participatory in nature

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Critical Dialoging as a Useful Tool for Action-provoking Questions

With the topic of gender roles, three groups chose articles about male gender stereotypes—that is, a high portion of men taking jobs largely held by women, i.e. male teachers in elementary school, and men being masculine. More specifically, Group 1 chose an article about the change of gender composition in the USA job market. Women are much more likely to have moved into the high-paying or high-status jobs, and low-status jobs are not a matter of gender, but of being lower class. It leads more men, usually lower class disadvantaged men, to take jobs typically held by women such as a cashiers in the market. The article Group 3 chose was about problems caused by unequal gender

representation with Seoul public elementary school teachers. Nine out of ten people who passed the elementary teacher certificate examination in 2017 were female, and this could cause some problems such as weakening discipline in classrooms. Some critics argue for setting a male teacher quota for recruitment exams to balance the ratio whereas female teachers disagree. Group 5 chose an article about how male stereotypes (that is being strong and masculine) affect boys in negative ways (for example, forcing boys to be silent in expressing their emotions). The article concludes that it is necessary to teach boys to break the emotional silence, express their emotions and communicate with parents.

The other groups chose articles about women gender stereotypes—in other words, women being paid less, women having less financial knowledge, and women being primarily responsible for family care. To be concrete, Group 2 read an article about the wage gap between women and men in Britain. Female presenters in the article argued that women at the BBC were paid less than men, but the writer of this article argues that there is little or no difference between the wages of men and women at the same level, company and function. Group 4 chose an article about women's attitudes toward finance. According to the article, women's attitudes toward finance remains stuck, so women must learn to budget, prioritize, save for retirement, protect themselves and their families and gain financial literacy. Finally, the article that Group 6 chose is about married women's roles in Korea. Traditionally, women in Korea visit their husband's parents most often and they must cook for the husbands' family. They are also responsible for caring for all the family members. More drastic change is needed to let them make their voices heard about this gender inequality.

As mentioned in the methodology section, each group was encouraged to actively participate in a critical dialogue on the writer's purpose, point of view and cultural values, and it was revealed that such dialogue activity led students to think about the issues in their local context or better ways to portray the same issue. Table 3 summarizes the questions provoked by the students after reading the articles.

Group 1 and 3 paid attention to the content of the article they chose and wondered how to make the article more intriguing (Group 1) or more objective and relevant (Group 3). Group 2 and 4 realized that they need to let people around them know about the situation (the wage gap for Group 2 and the need for financial education for women with Group 4). Group 5 and 6 wondered whether the situation that they read happens in their daily life in local contexts (male stereotype in Korea for Group 5 and married women's roles in Korea in Group 6).

With the topic of race, on the other hand, three groups (Group 1, Group 4, Group 6) read articles about the discrimination of African Americans in the USA, one group (Group 2) about the discrimination of Asian Americans in the USA, and two groups (Group 3 and Group 5) about discrimination of foreign workers and African Americans in Korea. Group

TABLE 3
Action-provoking Reflections/Questions of the Readings on Gender Roles

Randomized Groups	Reading Topic	Emerging Reflections/Questions by the Student Members in Groups
1	Women's jobs	The article is boring to read. How can we make this article more intriguing for readers?
2	Pay gaps	We need to let people around us know about wage differences between men and women. How can we do this?
3	Male teachers	Some information in the article is not objective and relevant. How can we make this article more objective and relevant?
4	Women's roles in finance	We need to help women raise their financial awareness. How can we do this?
5	Male gender stereotypes	Does the situation described in the article happen for boys in Korea?
6	Married women's roles in Korea	Are married women in Korea really living in the way the article describes?

I read an article about the different views on race discrimination between blacks and whites in terms of a country divided over race, the Trump factor, racism in the real world and reverse racism. Group 4 read an article about racial profiling of African American kids, saying that they were viewed as potential gangs and often treated inappropriately by the police. Group 6's article is about how minority races experience white privilege. It said whiteness allows one to leave the starting gate quicker and to run the race with fewer obstacles. For example, if you were born white, you are likely to earn more money.

Group 2 selected an article about the discrimination of Asian American students in Ivy League university admissions in the USA. According to the article, a coalition of Asian American groups filed lawsuits accusing Ivy League institutions of performing racial quotas against Asian American students in their undergraduate admissions policies, but Harvard said that the college's approach to admission was fully compliant with federal law. Group 3 and Group 5 chose articles about the discrimination of foreign workers and Africans in Korea. The article Group 3 read is about how South Koreans have become more unfavorable to migrant workers due to the prolonged economic slump. Group 5 read an article about an owner of a bar in Itaewon, Seoul, who refused to serve Africans because he believed that African customers could transmit the Ebola virus, but the owner later posted an apology letter to smooth relations.

Interactive dialogue among students in the groups examining the content using a critical perspective helped them to come up with questions on the issues in their own contexts. For instance, Group 1 members discussed and agreed that nonwhites are described as blacks in the article and discrimination of other races was missing. They also wondered if it is true that 60% of white people experience reverse racism. The student-initiated reflections

guided them to wonder if Koreans also feel reverse racism by foreigners living in Korea supported by the Korean government educationally, medically, and economically. Similarly, other groups initiated doubts or questions on the readings as shown in Table 2: Group 2 about race discrimination and reverse racism in Korea, Group 3 about foreign workers in Korea, Group 4 about unjustifiable discrimination of black kids in the USA, Group 5 about discrimination of Africans in Korea, and Group 6 about white privilege in the USA. These are summarized in Table 4.

TABLE 4
Action-provoking Reflections/Questions of the Readings on Race

Randomized Groups	Reading Topic	Emerging Reflections/Questions by the Student Members in Groups
1	How blacks are treated in the USA	How do Koreans feel about financial support provided to foreigners in Korea?
2	Discrimination of Asian American students in Ivy League admissions	More examples or quotes of other victims on the matter are needed. More people should know. How can we inform them?
3	Migrant workers in Korea	What aspects of the economic slump influence the negative perception of migrant workers in Korea?
4	Black kids in the USA	It is not justifiable in any sense that the police in the USA should treat black kids as potential gang members. What shall we do?
5	Banning Africans in Itaewon, Seoul	Is there any program for race discrimination in educational settings in Korea?
6	White privilege in the USA	All the points concentrate on blacks. There is no solution for white privilege. How do Koreans perceive white privilege? How can we make this article more conclusive?

4.2. A Variety of Participatory Action Outcomes in Groups

With the articles on gender roles, Group 1 and Group 3 decided to edit the articles so that readers would be more interested in reading them. More specifically, Group 1 changed the title (a sentence-type title to a phrase-type title with a subtitle), added more pictures to interest readers in the content, and added charts and notes to increase the validity of the article. Group 3 also used the technique of addition (that is, inserting a chart, a quantifier *some*, a *because*-phrase, and a transition device *otherwise*) and deletion (deleting irrelevant sentences).

Group 2, Group 5 and Group 6 surveyed on the reading. Group 2 surveyed on the perception of wage differences between men and women in Korea to 62 students, and the questions and results are as follows: Have you ever thought about the wage difference between men and women? (21% never have thought about the wage difference between

men and women), have you ever searched or read about the wage difference between men and women? (31% never have searched or read about the wage difference between men and women), why have you not thought about the wage difference between men and women? (75% not interested or do not think about the issue), and does the wage difference between men and women exist in Korea? (11% the wage difference between men and women rarely exists). They then did a small campaign by distributing stickers “*Equal Pay for Equal Work*” “*Women, Like Men, Only Cheaper*” to increase people’s awareness on the wage gap.

Group 5 asked four questions on men’s opinions of stereotypes to 33 male students on campus: Have you tried to be more masculine? (Results: Almost 80% of them tried to be more masculine by doing more exercise), have you heard “*Men should not cry*” from parents or seniors? (Results: Two-thirds had experienced injustice because of their appearance or status in the army or at a company), have you heard “*Men should not cry*” from your parents or seniors? (Results: More than half of them said that they heard about it in their teens), and how much do your parents expect you to act as a man? (Results: Most of them have expectations from their parents such as supporting the whole family and doing heavy work). Group 6 also did a sticker survey with 23 female students and 23 male students on campus with the questions: Who works more during family holidays, women or men? (Results: 43 for women, 3 for men), do you go to your father’s house first or your mother’s house first? (Results: 35 for fathers’, 11 for mothers’), and as future daughters-in-law or sons-in-law, will you speak up when you get treated inappropriately? (Results: 39 for yes, 6 for no).

Finally, Group 4 made a board game to help women check their own financial situations and have more active attitudes on learning about financial matters. Table 5 summarizes the types of action outcomes that each group performed after reading articles on gender roles.

TABLE 5
Action Project Outcomes of the Gender Roles Readings

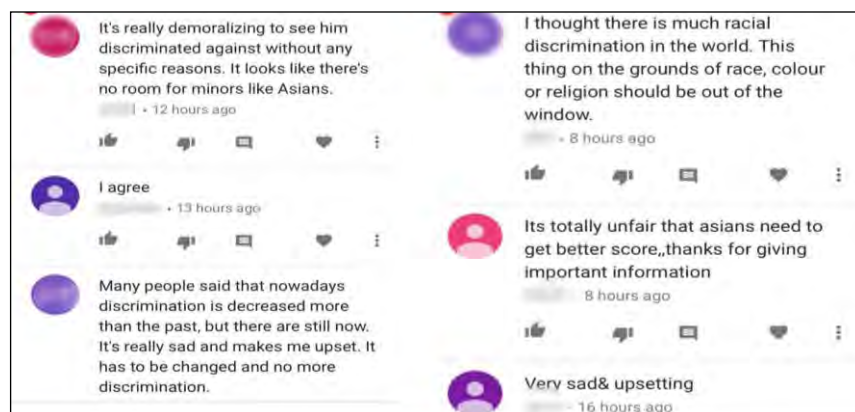
Group	Reading Topic	Action Project Outcomes
1	Women’s jobs	Editing the article
2	Pay gaps	Survey and small campaign
3	Male teachers	Editing the article
4	Women’s roles in finance	Making a game to help women raise awareness of their capacities in financial management
5	Male gender stereotypes	Survey
6	Married women’s roles in Korea	Sticker survey

With the readings on race, students did a variety of action projects. Group 1 surveyed the perception of other students on campus regarding discrimination of multicultural families and foreign workers and reverse racism on Koreans. The results showed that students think

that foreigners are discriminated against seriously, especially by their appearance, and many Koreans experience reverse racism regarding admission to college and losing jobs to foreigners. They made stickers about the right of students from multicultural families to education and about the minimum wage of foreign workers. Their actions were completed by distributing the stickers to students on campus.

Group 2 made a video and uploaded it on YouTube, the largest video platform to let more people know about Asian American discrimination. The contents of the video included an interview with Wang, the student who was rejected from an Ivy League school and another case of Vijay, who was rejected from an American medical school when he said that he was Indian American but was accepted when he said was African American. The group members received quite a few responses from all over the world and many of them used such emotional words as “unfair,” “upset,” “sympathetic,” and “sad.” Most people felt upset and sympathetic toward this situation as shown in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1
YouTube Responses of the Video Clip Made by Group 2



Group 3 sent an e-mail to the writer to ask about what aspects of the economic slump influenced the negative perception of migrant workers in Korea. The following is part of the e-mail: “*You mentioned that there is correlation between economic depression and perception of discrimination, so we wonder if there are concrete bases or research results of your claim.*” Group 4 donated five dollars to ACT NOW, a funding group fighting race discrimination in the USA since Group 4 thought that the article they read corresponded to criminal justice in the nine domains of the site. They also sent SNS messages to their friends to help people of color by introducing the site.

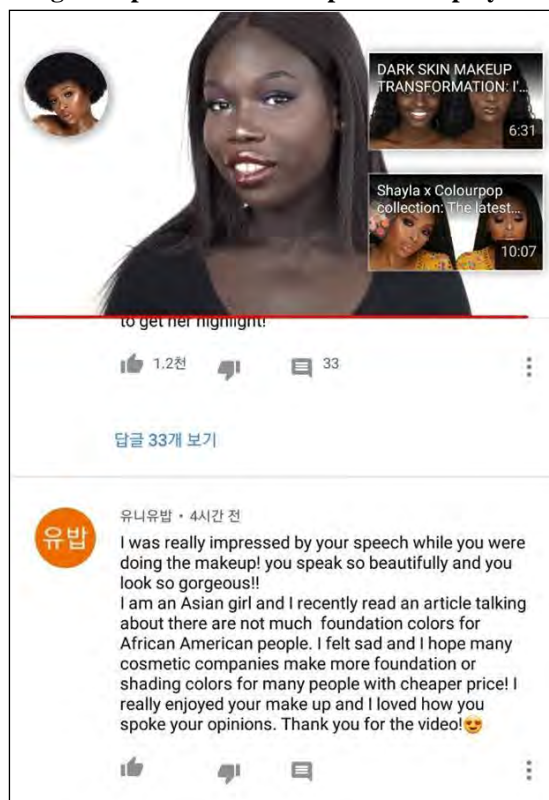
Group 5 designed a two-hour program on race discrimination for teachers to use. In the first class, teachers would help students think about race discrimination by introducing

concrete cases. In the next class, students are invited to make class rules that may prevent students from engaging in race discrimination in the class. Implementing the lesson plans in a real classroom may help students change their perception of skin color and further develop community building as intercultural citizens.

Group 6 decided to edit the article on race by adding a conclusion since there was no solution to white privilege in the article. They also searched YouTube to find sites about makeup for African American women since they read in the article that there are few options for foundation for them to use. They realized that the writer was right after watching a video clip of an African American woman, a Harvard law school student, who could not find makeup that matched her exact skin tone, so she has to buy two shades and mix them together to get a match. They left a response for that video clip as shown in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2

Leaving a Response for Make-up Video Clip by Group 6



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1SyGsf66SY>

Table 6 summarizes the action project outcomes that each group did after reading the articles on race.

TABLE 6
Action Project Outcomes of the Readings on Race

Group	Reading Topic	Action Project Outcomes
1	How blacks are treated in the USA	Survey on race discrimination and reverse racism, making and distributing stickers
2	Discrimination of Asian American students in admissions to Ivy League schools	Making a video and uploading it to YouTube
3	Migrant workers in Korea	E-mailing the writer
4	Black kids in the USA	ACT NOW donation in the USA, sending SNS messages to friends
5	Banning Africans in Itaewon	Designing lesson plans for race discrimination for Korean middle school students, first grade
6	White privilege	Editing (adding conclusion), YouTube comments

The action types the groups did in their local contexts are as follows: 1) Survey, the most preferred type of action that many groups did (Group 2, Group 5, and Group 6 for readings on gender roles, and Group 1 for the reading on race), 2) editing, another popular type of action (Group 1 and Group 3 edited what they read on gender roles and Group 6 on race), 3) other types including sending an e-mail (Group 3 sent an e-mail after the reading on race), making a game (Group 4 for the reading on gender role), giving a donation (Group 4 for the reading on race), making lesson plans (Group 5 for the reading on race) and making a video (Group 2 for the reading on race).

4.3. Growth as Active Readers and Citizens by Actually Participating and Taking Action

As revealed in the previous sections, participating in action projects in this critical reading class helped students question the issues by themselves, seek more information they were not familiar with and take action. Other findings were that the students struggled with several challenges, but they developed themselves to become more active readers by getting over such struggles as readers. For instance, three groups reported that choosing an article was difficult for them to do. *“Choosing an appropriate article for the topic, gender roles, was difficult. Many of famous journals did not deal with our topic, male stereotypes in Korea (Group 5).”* *“It was hard for us to find an article of writer’s opinion on gender roles because most articles are focused on delivering simple facts (Group 4).”* *“Choosing*

an article was challenging for us since there are too many articles on gender roles (Group 2).” Since such challenges were expected, the teacher guided students on how to select an appropriate article for their presentation with some criteria: Find an article related to the topic, keep the length of article to 2-3 pages, use reliable reading resources, and choose an article of similar difficulty level to the readings they read with the teacher in class. Even though they had guidelines in selecting an article for the topics, some groups brought articles they had chosen on gender roles to the teacher to make it sure the articles were good for their presentations on gender roles. However, with the second presentation on race, none of them brought articles to the teacher before the presentation. This observation by the teacher revealed that the students became more confident selecting articles not by the teacher but by themselves, gaining agency as readers.

The students also struggled with a lack of background knowledge about the issues that they read. For instance, the students in Group 1 struggled with the issue of racism in American society since they did not know much about it. Group 4 also reported that it was hard for them to understand the article that they chose since they had little knowledge of African American kids in the USA. Overall, the students felt more distance with the readings on race due to lack of socio-cultural background knowledge. In addition, jargon in the articles on race—for example, political words such as *white supremacists*, *neo-Nazis*, and *reverse racism*—made students have trouble in understanding the texts. To deal with such struggles, the teacher often observed that the students in groups often dialogued with one another about the words or parts that they did not understand and shared their knowledge on the issues. In their presentations, they reported that they searched for information on the issues using the internet. Such observations and reports revealed that the students were not passive in understanding the texts as they often did in previous reading classes by translating and solving comprehension check-up questions, but they were more actively engaged in their reading by participating in discussion with group members or seeking further information.

On the other hand, participating in educational-action projects helped students understand the readings more deeply, leading them to raise self-awareness on the issues in the readings and to do some actions in their own context. For instance, regarding the readings on gender roles, Group 2 reported they learned that sex equality differs by country, and there are also women who are fighting for their rights in Europe. Such realizations led them to survey students on campus about their perception of wage differences between men and women in Korea and to distribute stickers they made. Some responses from campus students after getting the stickers include, *“I should realize the seriousness of this problem.”* *“There were some prejudices I would not know.”* *“I would like to know more from now on.”* By doing such an action, they hoped people would think more about the wage difference between men and women.

In the readings on race, Group 2 self-reported that they learned how Asian Americans are discriminated against in schools and how schools react to these problems. What they did was to upload a video clip they made, and they were able to think about the discrimination of Asian Americans by reading responses on the YouTube video clip from people around the world. Group 4 learned that there was discrimination for not only African American adults but also children, who were treated as potential criminals, leading Group 4 to donate to a funding site for race discrimination in the USA. Group 5 learned the ways of using language could hurt people and cause serious problems as they read the article on banning Africans from a restaurant in Seoul. They realized that there are nearly no programs teaching about racial discrimination in schools in Korea and they made a program on race discrimination for teachers to use at school. Group 6 learned that discrimination on skin color is prevalent all around the world and self-reflected that the overall tone of the article was focused on the color of people, especially African Americans, and the conclusion was not clear. Such self-reflection led them to add a conclusion to the article, search a video clip on YouTube to check about the fact that they read in the article and leave a response for the video clip.

As briefly described above, even though it was neither a big movement nor a largely influential action, the students were successful in completing some actions in their local contexts as active readers and citizens. It seems they became more familiar with what they should consider as active readers—questioning themselves the issues they read about, seeking more information they were not familiar with, and taking actions—as a participant responded: *“We did a small thing, but we thought we should do something, starting from the bottom to change the world (a student from Group 2, in response to their action on race).”* Interestingly, compared to actions on gender roles (editing, making stickers, surveys, making a game), they became more active on the topic of race (survey, making video, sending e-mail, donation, lesson planning, editing). The issue of color is not as familiar as that of gender roles since they live in Korea, seldom having a chance to deal with such issues in their daily life, and such unfamiliarity with the topic seemed to intrigue them to critically think about the issue, to raise their awareness of the issue, and to act in various ways.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study is to explore how university students in an English critical reading class participated in educational action projects and how they became more active readers. The action project topics were gender roles and race because they are common topics dealt with in critical literacy. The students in groups were encouraged not only to

check their understanding of the readings they chose to read but also to dialogue and reflect on what they read from a critical perspective. It was revealed that dialoguing among students in groups helped them come up with questions on the reading, led them to think about the issues in their own context and initiated them to action as active citizens. The student-initiated reflection resulted in a variety of action outcomes: editing, making stickers, surveys, making a game of the readings on gender roles, making video, sending e-mail, donation, lesson planning, and editing of the readings on race. It was also revealed that the students struggled with several challenges such as the selection of articles and a lack of background knowledge about the cultures in the readings, but they developed themselves to become more active readers by getting over such struggles by asking for help from the teacher, reciprocal teaching, sharing knowledge, and seeking further information, to name a few. In general, students were collaborative in helping each other understand the readings, critically reflect of the issues in the readings, and design and perform actions in their local contexts. Considering that the students participating in this study had little prior experience reading texts in English from critical perspectives and initiating an action as readers, the results of this study suggest that reading teachers can implement the instruction in this study in their own teaching context successfully.

There are several pedagogical implications for this study that teachers can consider when designing their own reading class. First, it is necessary for teachers to select appropriate reading topics and reading materials considering students' reading proficiency and interests. As mentioned in previous sections, the teacher selected gender roles and race as reading topics since those are common topics dealt with in literacy classes and the students felt an interest in readings about the topics. As a teacher, however, it was challenging to let students select their own reading topics for their presentations. Even though the teacher gave guidelines to students to select appropriate articles in terms of reading proficiency and topic, some students asked for help from the teacher in selecting readings to prepare their first presentation. Depending on the students' level, therefore, teachers may let students choose readings by themselves with a teacher's guidelines as in this study or may use reading textbooks with controversial topics and ask students to do some actions based on the readings.

Secondly, the results of this study imply that thought-encouraging questions (Golding, 2011) by the teacher piqued students' interest in the readings and guided them to participate in group discussions on the readings, provoking their reflections and critical questions and action outcomes. Examples of thought-encouraging questions used in this study are: What do you know about the topic? What kinds of personal experiences do you have with the readings? What do you feel while reading the texts? What is the writer's purpose? What is the writer's point of view? What are hidden cultural values in the reading? What can/do you do outside the classroom to foster yourselves as active citizens in your local context?

The teacher of this study modeled how to read the sample readings with the questions in the class, observed how the students read their own readings with the questions, and then faded out so that students freely talked about and prepared their action outcomes. Such a 'model-observe-fade' approach (Hmelo-Silver & Barrows, 2006) was effective not only in giving more power to students as readers but also in helping students come up with their own ideas, opinions, and solutions.

Thirdly, this study revealed that the students raised self-awareness of the issues in the readings and acted in their own contexts as active readers and citizens. Since the students seldom had experiences extending what they read to social actions, it is essential to guide them to think about their social actions. The teacher in this study introduced examples of social actions such as making a drawing, writing a letter and making books as in Crookes (2013), Janks (2010), and Porto, Daryai-Hansen, Arcuri and Schifler (2017). In addition, teachers need to run such a reading class slowly, giving students enough time to progress their actions. It was observed that it took time for the students in this study to think about, discuss, design, and act. Students need time to get familiar with this type of class that requires them to select their own reading, to self-check or teach one another difficult-to-understand parts, to reflect and critically question the reading, and to take action. Also, teachers need to give students chances to share action outcomes in class. It is not enough for teachers to ask students to act and to assign what they do as tasks. It is essential to give opportunities for them to present the progress of action taking: comprehension check-ups, reflections, questions, struggles, learning points, and action outcomes. Next, teachers need to play the roles of guide and facilitator for students to interact, dialogue, and initiate action outcomes in a collaborative atmosphere. The students in this study in general actively participated in the process of critical reading in action even though there were struggles to critically analyze the society based on the readings and do some actions. Dialogue among students in a collaborative manner seems to "call on students to co-develop a joint learning process" (Shor, 1992, p. 90).

One might question how the teacher assessed the students' performance in the reading class. Both teachers and students in Korea are familiar with product-oriented assessment and often cast doubts on process-oriented assessment as done in this study. As Shohamy (2001) claims, however, teachers can use multiple assessment procedures such as portfolios, self-assessment, projects, observations and tests, and we as teachers need to move towards participatory and dialogic testing and have positive attitudes to use more democratic forms of testing. Finally, this study of action-based practice in a reading class is a case study with small numbers of students. It is necessary to pursue action-oriented reading class in other educational contexts in the future and accumulate recordings of each case in different contexts to broaden our knowledge of this field.

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APPENDIX A

Student Resources on Gender Roles

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APPENDIX B

Student Resources on Race

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