

ENHANCING STUDENTS' CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS THROUGH CRITICAL WRITING

A Preliminary Study

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Abstract

Writing is a trained-skill that needs process to master it. When a student is trying to write, he must start from organizing ideas. Furthermore, critical thinking is also a necessary skill in writing. In education field, critical thinking is considered as a crucial part that should be achieved by students in 21st century. Critical writing and critical thinking are two necessary skills should be mastered by university students. Writing arguments, essays, and thesis are daily learning activities they should do. When learning activities cannot trig students to write clear argumentation on their writing it means that their critical thinking cannot be well-developed as well. This paper aimed to explore how students' critical thinking can be enhanced through their critical writing skill in English as Foreign Language (EFL) classroom in a private college in Indonesia. The method used in this research was descriptive qualitative through observation of actual teaching practice, students learning activities and analysis of students' critical writing papers. The finding shows that students' critical writing skill trigs their critical thinking. It can be concluded that critical thinking and critical writing skills is an integrated skill that students must achieve as a goal of their EFL achievement in higher education.

Keywords : **Enhancing, critical thinking, critical writing**

Introduction

Mastering English skills is one of the goals in English language teaching in Indonesia. For most students, especially in Indonesia where English is taught as foreign language, mastering English is quite difficult because they are required to have an adequate knowledge of the language, which has a different system in terms of vocabulary and structure with their mother language. The similar problems are also faced by many university students. When the students read an English text and express their ideas in written language, they are still confused and face problems to understand the text and delivering the message. In this case, it is very crucial for students to have well literacy in order to be able to think critically.

Writing is one of productive skills in learning English that must be mastered by students. They have to use their language ability to compose some words into sentences and get them written into a text. Writing is a trained-skill that needs process to master it. Nejmaoui (2018) stated that when a student is trying to write, he must start from organizing ideas. Furthermore, critical thinking is also a necessary skill in writing. Anyhow, many students have acknowledged that being competent in mastering English as foreign language is challenging. They face some linguistics difficulties in mastering English. Grammatically, they are confronted with the varieties of English sentence pattern which are completely different from the students' first and mother tongue. Semantically, English word which is rich in meaning, one word

contains a literal, a contextual and a figurative meaning makes their reading comprehension is getting worse. It is not surprising, then, the student who learns English as a foreign language feels not easy to interpret and understand something spoken or written. This condition is not adequate to make students to be able to think critically since their critical thinking abilities are neglected.

In education field, critical thinking (CT) is considered as a crucial part that should be achieved by students in 21st century. English Language Teaching (ELT) class in several areas Indonesia can be used as media to teach CT to the students, especially in the context of higher education. As a cognitive process, critical thinking should be determined as an educational goal must be achieved by the students. However, based on Davies (2013) it is not easy to define the concept of critical thinking and this makes students often struggle with it, but according to Davies (2013) and Bali (2015) it is generally agreed that CT is an intrinsic part of higher education.

Related to CT, teacher-centred method was dominating learning method in the classroom based on previous education system. The students copied what their teacher/lecturer and book said rather than thinking by themselves as Turmudi (2020) stated and it becomes a serious problem when they are studying at a higher education level. Critical writing and critical thinking are two necessary skills should be mastered by university students. Pei et al (2017) stated that writing arguments, essays, and thesis are daily learning activities they should do. These activities trigger students' cognitive skills improvement, such as memorizing, critical thinking, and knowledge. This activity also improves their ability to think, especially critical thinking in the academic context. When learning activities cannot trigger students to write clear argumentation

on their writing it means that their critical thinking cannot be well-developed as well.

The research question in this study is "how can critical writing enhance students critical thinking skill??" Therefore, the objective of this study is to explore how students' critical thinking can be enhanced through their critical writing skill in English as Foreign Language (EFL) classroom in a private college in Indonesia.

While exploring effective ways to infuse critical thinking in writing courses, a fundamental premise is to have a commonly recognized theoretical framework that will ensure a shared understanding of critical thinking (CT) and the teaching of CT in a writing context. Although as stated by Davies (2013) that it is considered to be beneficial to the development of a common framework that are applicable to every discipline, it is considered critically important to take account of the specific needs and characteristics of learners in different disciplines. Towards establishing such a theoretical framework for guiding the teaching of CT.

The term critical thinking is used so widely that it seems to have become an academic jargon that "has evolved to an ineffective umbrella term to subjugate the classic building blocks used as grounded foundations for effective thinking" as stated by Duchscher (1999). The variety of labels for CT (such as reflective thinking, problem solving skills, higher order thinking, rational thought, etc.) result in a confusion of the concept of CT among both researchers and practitioners. As Larsson (2017) (2004) and Halpern & Stenberg (2020) claims, the concept of CT is seldom clearly or comprehensively defined. Furthermore, it also seems to be perceived differently in various cultural contexts. Moore stated that many researchers from a variety of fields have

identified the potential benefits of developing a consensus in the definition of CT so as to promote unity in a discipline, simplify evaluation and facilitate the research on CT (2013).

While design of innovative activities that foster students' CT can certainly be beneficial, there is a need to explore how commonly used writing activities can be modified with an infusion of CT and thus become more effective for promoting CT, which makes the CT-oriented writing approach not only less time-consuming or risky for teachers, but also less intimidating for students. As brainstorming and peer review are commonly organized activities in the writing process and are believed to be beneficial to developing and evaluating ideas as stated by Akram et al., (2020), the two activities are redesigned to infuse the teaching and practice of CT skills in students' writing practices and peer interactions. First of all, a CT-oriented brainstorming activity is designed to allow students to use CT skills to develop ideas before they begin to write their first drafts. Different from traditional brainstorming activities, the CT-oriented brainstorming is designed to be a structured activity to help students to develop ideas by thinking through the eight essential CT elements involved in the given tasks. During the brainstorming activities, the students are provided with the CT oriented brainstorming worksheet, which is designed based on Rohayati and Friatin (2021) investigation on their study showed that "elements of thought", with the brainstorming worksheet, students are required to discuss the eight essential CT elements by asking and answering the corresponding questions. Their answers are the results of thinking and discussions concerning the CT elements that facilitate them to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the given tasks and to effectively develop ideas for their writing. Of course, students are also allowed to

discuss other elements they consider important for their writing. After students finish their first drafts, they are required to participate in a CT-oriented peer review activity, which is designed to help them to evaluate and improve their ideas.

Methodology

The research method used in this study was descriptive qualitative approach that explored how students' critical writing skill can enhance their critical thinking in EFL classroom. The sample of this study was fourth semester students of English Education Department at Universitas Bhinneka PGRI, totally 32 students. This study was conducted in Kabupaten Tulungagung, East Java Province, Indonesia. Data collecting technique used in this study were observation of both actual teaching practice and students learning activities and analysis of students' critical writing papers. In observing both actual teaching practice and students learning activities researcher observed the process of discussion before the students wrote critical writing. In critical writing activities, the students were given a scientific journal article and they were asked to read and review it critically based on writing or paper template given by the lecturer starting from introduction, summary, analysis and conclusion. Triangulation was conducted to have strong validity of this study. The observation in classroom was conducted in eight meetings, which each meeting was done once in a week.

Finding and Discussion

Based on data gathered, the researcher found that there were some steps the students did in doing critical writing activities. They

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers concluded that there were some important steps the students must do in critical writing activities. Those steps play crucial role in enhancing student's critical thinking skill. In this context, when students' critical writing activities trigs their critical thinking skill, It can be concluded that critical thinking and critical writing skills is an integrated skill that students must achieve as a goal of their EFL achievement in higher education.

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