

## **Critical Thinking on the Perspective of Indonesian Students in Language Learning**

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### **Abstract:**

This article describes Indonesian university students' perspectives of critical thinking on their language learning in the class. Regarding that critical thinking has an important point to the students' language learning development, such as problem solving, reasoning, etc. University in Indonesia has already implied this skill to their curriculum but most of teacher were focusing on the language skill development without paying attention of students thinking development, in which makes students have difficulties on thinking critically. This research is using qualitative research that aims to investigate Indonesian student's perception of having critical thinking class that separated from the language skill class, in order to make them focus in developing their critical thinking. The subject of this research is taken from 15 participants from different city and university in Indonesia. The data resulted that every student realized that critical thinking is very important to their language development, but in some cases the university still could not facilitate them to be critical thinkers.

**Key Words:** perspective, critical thinking, language development

### **Introduction**

Higher education aims to make their students having a higher way of thinking, in which it is believed as one key to reaching their success after studying (Deyglio, 2015). It is strengthened by the need for every employer to have employees that able to solve any complex problem they face, communicate effectively, and think critically (Scott, n.d.). However, even universities have developed such a good curriculum that covers critical thinking as the goal of learning, there are some students that still could not able to think critically (Alagozlu, 2007). It can be seen from the quality of questions and answers during the teaching and learning process conducted in the university class. Most of them are asking and answering questions only to fulfill the requirement of being active during the teaching and learning activities. As it is found that teachers think that they have encouraged and included critical thinking in their teaching process, but in fact they are merely focusing on the comprehension of the subject matter (Choy & Cheah, 2009).

The role of critical thinking on students' language development is very important to their way of thinking since it covers reasoning and evaluating evidence or recognizing contradictions

or distinguishing relevant from irrelevant facts (Vdovina, 2013). As it emphasized by Bloom (1956) and Krathwohl et al. (2002) that critical thinking is a skill that helps students to create a reasonable perspective based on the information they achieved before, during, or after the class activity. And it is about the skill that can help the student to make a good decision of their choice when they encounter a new problem or situation by not using an illogical, irrational thinking (Facione, 2011). The way of thinking is necessary to be mastered by students since, today, we live in the digital era that every people can share anything through social media, etc. All information exists on the internet are not always good, some of them could give a bad impact to students if they could not filter the information through high order thinking analysis. Therefore, critical thinking becomes the primary objective of current high education (Halpern, 2014). These critical thinking strategies could give significant impact to students' language development (Shirkhani & Fahim, 2011).

This research will focus on Indonesian students' perspective regarding the need of critical thinking on their language development. That aims to know whether Indonesians students have realized the importance of critical thinking to their language development. Also, to know whether this skill has been taught in their university as one important skill or it only taught implicitly within the lesson in their class. Therefore, the research question can be formulated as how is students' perception on the importance of critical thinking in the EFL learning process? And how is students' perception of teaching critical thinking as different subject that separated from the EFL subject?

The result of the research is expected to be useful for students to understand the importance of critical thinking in their language development, and for the most is to give them good provisions facing the upcoming future after they have graduated. It is believed that the result of this research is very important to every teacher and students in the university level to know that critical thinking is needed to be taught, either explicitly or implicitly, since the goal of university education is to facilitate students developing their ways of thinking into higher thinking skills.

## Defining Critical Thinking

Critical thinking was first highlighted by Bloom's taxonomy a few decades ago, that organized the major of thinking into six classes. The first three classes consist of *knowledge*, the ability to recall previously learning material; *comprehension*, the ability to grasp meaning, explain, restate ideas; and *application*, the ability to use learned material in new situation, these three classes are included into the lower level of thinking, in which only involving remembering, relating and applying information respectively. On the other hand, the last three classes that consist of: *analysis*, the ability to separate material into component parts and show relationship between parts; *synthesis*, the ability to put together the separate ideas to form new whole, establish relationship; and *evaluation*, the ability to judge the worth of material against stated

criteria, are included in the high level of thinking that need a critical thinking involved in analyzing and evaluating the information (Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl, 1956; Krathwohl et al., 2002). Bloom (1956) mentioned that students need to be independent learners that able to be responsible with their knowledge. Moreover, in processing a new information, dealing with some problems, and new material students need to have higher order thinking to solve it. As he stated that:

“...Thus, it is expected that when the student encounters a new problem or situation, he will select an appropriate technique for attacking it and will bring to bear the necessary information, both facts, and principles. This has been labeled "critical thinking"....” (Bloom et al., 1956, p. 38).

Bloom (1956) defined critical thinking as a skill that helps students to create a reasonable perspective based on the information they achieved before, during, or after the class activity. And it is about the skill that can help the student to make a good decision of their choice when they encounter a new problem or situation. The way of thinking is necessary to be mastered by students since, today, we live in the digital era that every people can share anything through social media, etc. All information exists on the internet are not always good, some of them could give a bad impact to students if they could not filter the information through high order thinking analysis. Therefore, critical thinking becomes the primary objective of current high education (Halpern, 2014).

### **The Need for Critical Thinking in this Era**

Many experts believe that critical thinking is an essential skill that can promote students' success in the future. Thomas (2017) stated students that having higher order thinking will represent a well-educated people when they are faced with any problem later when they have graduated. In addition, it is believed that students' ability to think critically they can do two more things than students that their order thinking in the low level, that is call as “*explanation*” and “*self-regulation*”. They are able to explain what they think and how they arrived at some judgment and they can apply their powers of critical thinking to themselves and improve on their previous opinions (Facione, 2011). Moreover, if we take a look at the current media technology development, such as social media, etc., that grow very fast. It facilitates people to absorb any information uploaded there, even without any filter of ‘important stuff’. There are a lot of content that needs to be aware of for every student to absorb the information (Halpern, 2014). That is why, teaching this skill by importing it to the subject matter in the university is very important to the students' language development (Shirkhani & Fahim, 2011).

### **Teaching Critical Thinking on ELT**

Barrie (2006) divided the concept of generic graduate attributes four distinctions, they are precursory, complementary, translation and enabling. Some academics express an understanding of generic graduate attributes as basic precursory abilities students bring to the university and which provide a minimum base to which can be added the discipline knowledge of a university education. Other academics express an understanding of graduate attributes that goes beyond this to encompass additional general functional abilities and personal skills that can usefully complement the discipline specific learning outcomes of a university education. Other academics understand generic attributes to be more than useful additional general skills, rather they are specialized variants of such general skills that are essential in the application of discipline knowledge and the translation of university learning to unfamiliar settings thus usefully transforming the products of university learning. Some academics express a yet more complex understanding of generic attributes as enabling abilities and aptitudes that lie at the heart of scholarly learning and knowledge, with the potential to transform the knowledge they are part of and to support the creation of new knowledge and transform the individual. In conclusion, the teacher can teach their students critical thinking within the EFL subject if the teacher sees that critical thinking as a part of “translation conception”. In this view, critical thinking should be included within the subject knowledge and the assessment. On the other hand, teaching critical thinking can be separated from the EFL subject if we see from the point of view of “complementary conception” (Thomas, 2017).

### **Critical Thinking on Language Development**

The promotion of critical thinking into the ELT classrooms is significance for several reasons. First, it helps students to be critical readers that could help them absorbing the information from the task, it is done during their pre-writing activity. Second, it also helps them in getting ideas and construct it into a good paragraph, it is done during the process of writing. Third, in the final step of the writing activity, it could help them in criticizing their own writing product to find out whether their own arguments are acceptable with a clear and enough supporting evidence or not. The most salience role of critical thinking in the academic writing is able to help the students to problematize their own thinking before come up with their final writing product (Cooper & Patton, 2004). These strategies, leads the students to be an open minded that can criticize any task problem, even it is opposing their own believe to do so (Barnet & Bedau, 2014; Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1996). In addition Shirkhani & Fahim (2011) added that students can be responsible for their own thinking, can monitor and evaluate their own ways of learning more successfully. Vdovina (2013) confirmed that critical thinking provides learners with a more skillful way of communicating with other people, acquiring new knowledge, and dealing with ideas, beliefs, and attitudes.

## Methodology

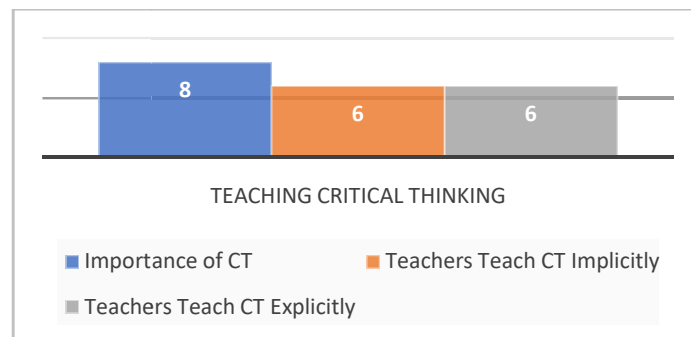
The investigation of this research was using qualitative approach that aims to explore and understand the perception of Indonesian students related to critical thinking on their EFL class (Creswell, 2014). The research subject of this research was 15 Indonesian students from different city and different university in Indonesia. The data obtained by using questionnaire that consist of 6 questions. The 5 questions are scale optional questions that asking their understanding of critical thinking and their perception to the implementation of teaching critical thinking in the teaching and learning process in their university. The other one is an essay question that asking about their perception of learning critical thinking independently, which means that learning critical thinking as one additional subject to develop their way of thinking to be higher order thinking.

For secondary data, Indonesian students critical thinking quality were analyzed based on their answer in the essay question, then the analysis will be compared to their answer about their knowledge of critical thinking based on their perception. The question is *“Please give your reason(s) regarding to your answer whether you agree or disagree about having critical thinking class that taught differently separated from the EFL subjects!”*. The analysis focus on their answer, whether it well-addressed or not to the question and whether their supporting opinion appropriate to the question (Paul & Elder, 2008).

## Findings

Figure 1 presents the students’ perception towards the importance of critical thinking and its implication in EFL.

Figure: 1



The importance of critical thinking and teaching critical thinking in the class

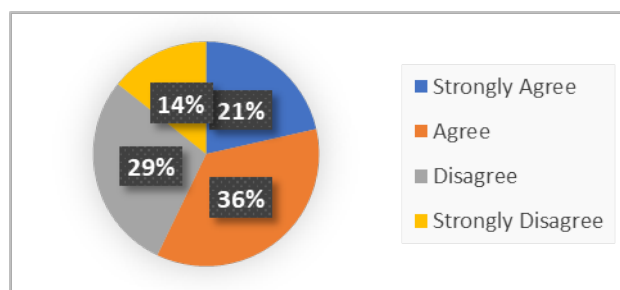
The data showed that Indonesian students had already know how important the critical thinking is on their language development activity since the mean score of the data showed on 8 (the mean score of scale 1 to 10). On this scale, it can be concluded that critical thinking is important to their language development activity. However, even the importance of critical

thinking had been known by the students, the implication of critical thinking in the teaching and learning still could not enough to promote their critical thinking. It can be seen from the scale that students choose that: teachers teach critical thinking implicitly within the subject matter is on 6; and teachers teach critical thinking explicitly is on 6. It can be concluded that, critical thinking has already taught for university students although it needs more improvement of teaching critical thinking in the EFL class activity.

The result indicate that Indonesian students agree that critical thinking as one important skill to be mastered in order to have a good quality of language skill product. However, based on the questionnaire, they believed that their teachers have already implied critical thinking on their material but it still need more to facilitate them in achieving higher order thinking. In order to do that teacher must be competent in using higher order thinking, since it involves how to give a good reasoning, a good decision making, and problem solving (Halpern, 2014; Mimbs, 2005). One student stated that, “... *In my college, only 30% lecture who add up the explanation of critical thinking. That is the reason why I as a student often find difficulty in writing.*” her statement reflects how her teachers were not aware of students’ higher order thinking development.

Figure 2 presents students’ perception on teaching critical thinking as different subject separated from the EFL subject.

Figure: 2



Teaching critical thinking as different subject separated from the EFL subject

Students were asked whether teaching critical thinking as different subject separated from the EFL subject will be a good idea, since they had already aware of their quality of thinking. The result of the questionnaire 36% were strongly agree of having critical subject that separated from EFL, 21% were agree, 29% were disagree, and 14% were strongly disagree.

Students that strongly agree and agree to the idea of having critical thinking class, believe that it is important to have critical thinking skill in order to be able to think logically. Since it is very important to be mastered by college students, students have to know well the basic theory of thinking development, as it addressed by student from Samarinda “... *It is important to teach the basic theory of thinking process....*”.

The other reason is because teaching and developing critical thinking by teaching it as a part of EFL subject is quite difficult to achieve the higher critical thinking since it is part of thinking development of taxonomy by Bloom, and it is quite hard to integrate this skill within the EFL subject, as it addressed by student from Banjarmasin “... *However, it is not an easy way to teach about it. teaching it differently separated from other subjects will help....*” And student from Ambon “... *Since CT can also be integrated in every language skills, so it is better to teach CT in different subject. Not to mention, CT also involves taxonomy bloom which is difficult to develop if it just a part of a particular subject....*”. Students view the importance of critical thinking as a complementary conception, in which it focused only on the students’ individual skill development. Their perception of having such separated critical thinking class showed their awareness and development of critical thinking within the EFL subject, since not all EFL teachers do not have higher order thinking (Barrie, 2006; Thomas, 2017).

Since critical thinking is a practical skill that need practice more than the theory, learning critical thinking as one other subject can maximize students thinking development and it will create a good atmosphere of the class activity from teacher centered learning to students centered learning (Vdovina, 2013). In addition, they believe that critical thinking class will implement an interesting technique of thinking development (Shirkhani & Fahim, 2011). As it addressed by students from Banjarmasin “... *Learning how to think critically needs much time and also many practices. Learning it differently separated from other subjects will maximize the result.*”; “*because critical thinking activities focus on students centered while in Indonesia still teacher centered, so that in my opinion it will be better to separate critical thinking or logic as a subject as a foundation for students to learn how think critically....*” and student from Bondowoso “... *it needs an interesting action in helping students to have critical thinking, it also needs a suitable technique in teaching students to develop their critical thinking.*”.

On the other hand, students that disagree and strongly disagree to have another independent class of critical thinking believed that learning critical thinking within the EFL subject is already enough to promote students with critical thinking. In order to make them having higher order thinking, teacher have to drill their students with some activities that able to develop their thought. This perception was addressed by 3 students, students from Aceh said that “*It could be taught as a part of writing or speaking course and I think it would be enough. The teacher might teach about it multiple times rather separate it from other courses since it is actually related.*”; in addition, students from Padang believed that “... *I view that critical thinking can always be incorporated like asking students’ opinion towards the difference of particular type of sentences or grammar....*”. These students view critical thinking as translation conception, in which they believed its development is within the other subject, and it could make students easier in applying the concept of critical thinking (Barrie, 2006; Thomas, 2017). However, inserting critical thinking within the EFL class need a good teacher to teach both, language skills and critical thinking, since some teachers perceive that they are encouraging

critical thinking in the EFL class, but they are merely focusing on the comprehension of the subject matter (Choy & Cheah, 2009).

### **The reality of Indonesian students' critical thinking today: the analysis of students' answer**

There are 15 data of research got from the questionnaire, 6 of them has already showed their quality of thinking, 8 of the answer could not address the question, and the last one answer has already addressed the question but it the answer was contradict with the elaboration. It can be concluded that, 60% from 15 Indonesian students that do not have higher order thinking.

*“Critical thinking is very important in writing because it make the writer more alert with the current issue, and situation. It also makes the products of writing more analytical and have deeper thoughts on the subject I explain in the writing. Because it makes me think to fulfil AREL in his/her writing. Hopefully, more people will be more aware with critical thinking.”*

This is one of student's answer, she strongly agrees in the idea of having critical thinking class. However, in her statement, do not stated why she has that idea, since she only explains that critical thinking is very important for writer and how critical thinking could help to think deeper in such information. But we found one very interesting idea related to how to write in a good organization. She stated “AREL”, this abbreviation stands for Assertion, Reason, Evidence, and Link Back. This is one of the ways how we could produce a good and clear statement, in which anything we are going to write must be has a clear statement, reason that support the statement, factual evidence, and it has to be restated or conclude in the end of paragraph. In case of the quality of her critical thinking needs to be improved since she failed in the very beginning of answering the question. A good answer must be clearly addressing the question and supported with reason and strengthened by evidence (Paul & Elder, 2008). Compared to her choice of her knowledge of critical thinking, her writing product is not well-showed her knowledge since she stated that her knowledge of critical thinking is on 9. Looking to this case, critical thinking is a practical skill that need to be applicable in any aspect of life, even understanding the concept of it is also important to their thinking development (Anderson et al., 2001; Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl, 1956).

*“It's good to have critical thinking subjects separately but not as a must. For chritical thinking is very practical so the best way of practicing it is by doing it along with other subjects. That means applying chritical thinking doesn't have to be sparated from another subjects.”*

The other example is the example of contradict answer from one of Indonesian students, he agrees to the idea of having critical thinking class. However, he is in doubt by stating “It's good to have critical thinking subjects separately but not as a must” and in the end of his



statement he proposed another idea that “...*applying chritical thinking doesn't have to be sparated from another subjects.*”. In fact, the question has already contradicted in the application of teaching and learning process, the answer must be solution whether it is good to have such this class or not and why, not between both. Compared to his choice of her knowledge of critical thinking, her way of thinking to solve a problem is not well built yet since he stated that her knowledge of critical thinking is on 8 scale. Looking to this case, developing critical thinking is important to make students able to solve any problem they faced with no doubt and logically accepted (Bloom et al., 1956).

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Critical thinking is an essential skill to be mastered by students in higher education, in which it is believed as one of requirement to reach their success (Deyglio, 2015). In fact, even critical thinking has already become the main objective of higher education, teachers were not aware of students' thinking development since they are focus more on the material, they taught (Choy & Cheah, 2009; Halpern, 2014). As it found that Indonesian students' critical thinking quality need more attention. Relating to the current situation in Indonesia, it is difficult to have different critical thinking class, teaching critical thinking can be seen from the translation conception that it could be taught within the EFL subject. In order to achieve the higher order thinking goal for students, teacher must be critical and creative by engaging students with activities that could develop their critical thinking. Since Indonesian students has already aware of the importance of critical thinking, every teacher should be aware too to it by keep implementing, implying, and applying critical thinking in their EFL class activity. However, there are still need much more research to strengthen the concept of teaching critical thinking to Indonesian university students.

Recommendations, since the analysis of students' critical thinking is the secondary data of this research, it is recommended for future researcher to explore it deeper. So, it will gain a better result and conclusion. Moreover, since the subject of this research were from various universities and cities, there are some problem that also affects the result, such as their cultural background knowledge, university's curriculum, and also teachers. Therefore, this problem can be a good chance to be explored in order to improve the understanding of critical thinking in Indonesia.

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