

Factors Affecting Students' Critical Thinking Development in EFL Classroom

1st Rosanita Tritias Utami
Pascasarjana Pendidikan Ilmu Bahasa
Universitas Negeri Semarang
 Indonesia
 rosa.utami@stkipppgritulungagung.ac.id

2nd Mursid Saleh
Pascasarjana Pendidikan Ilmu Bahasa
Universitas Negeri Semarang
 Indonesia

3rd Warsono
Pascasarjana Pendidikan Ilmu Bahasa
Universitas Negeri Semarang
 Indonesia

4th Rudi Hartono
Pascasarjana Pendidikan Ilmu Bahasa
Universitas Negeri Semarang
 Indonesia

Abstract—The Revolution of Industry 4.0 (IR 4.0) creates a new atmosphere in Indonesia educational system and as a result it brings education transformation. Being considered as playing important roles in learning process, students' critical thinking becomes a crucial domain to be well-developed as part of learning goal. The process of students' critical thinking development is affected by many factors. Lecturers as teachers or educator in higher education play a crucial role in their students' lives. This study aims to explore what kind of factors affect students' critical thinking development in English as Foreign Language (EFL) classroom in a private college in Indonesia. This exploration was determined from observation of actual teaching practice, students learning activities and analysis of lesson plan documents prepared by teachers. The finding shows that students' critical thinking development was affected by teachers' knowledge of how to build students' critical thinking, teachers' awareness of digital literacy and students' independent learning.

Keywords—*Affecting, Critical thinking, EFL Classroom*

I. INTRODUCTION

Critical thinking (CT) nowadays is considered as a crucial skill that should be mastered by students in 21st century. In some areas in Indonesia, critical thinking can be taught to the students through English language teaching (ELT) where English is taught as foreign language, especially to university students. Many experts have considered CT as a fundamental of crucial skill [1][2][3]. They believe that for higher education students, CT is extremely important to learn [4]. The students' critical thinking development is one of the core goals of higher education in Indonesia based on KKNI (National Quality Framework) and SN Dikti (National Standard of Higher Education) [5]

As one of 21st century skills critical thinking should be set as an educational purpose that must be achieved by higher education students. According to [6], students should be trained to use their thoughts to observe, think,

categorize, and hypothesize. These activities will gradually help students to be able to think critically. In the context of higher education, especially in Indonesia, the students still tend to accept opinions, especially on the current news of politics, corruption, and education, without evaluating them appropriately. This is probably because of their cultural background that makes them not to get used to give argumentation for something they do not agree.

The research question in this study is what factors affect students' critical thinking development in EFL classroom?" Therefore, the objective of this study is to explore factors affecting students' critical thinking development in EFL classroom.

A. *The Concept of Critical Thinking*

Many definitions and explanations of critical thinking have been explored widely. The roots of ideas, concepts, and interpretations about critical thinking have been determined in philosophy and psychology domains. The demand of critical thinking definition and implementation has been increased and it makes educators attempt to introduce critical thinking in teaching and educational systems. This activity should be done in order to make students able to be critical thinkers. The term of critical thinking has been widely used and "it seems to be learning goal 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" [7]. Scholars from various fields determined the benefits of constructing a consensus of critical thinking definition as to raise unity in a discipline, simplify evaluation and facilitate the research on critical thinking [8].

B. *The Definition of Critical Thinking*

In the context of educational setting, Bloom taxonomy has been widely used as basic of critical thinking skills definition and implementation. This taxonomy provides

detail information related to thinking skills within educational goals since these skills are “accepted as a viable type of supporting or complimentary curriculum to academic content” [9]. It is expected that higher education students will be able to develop their critical thinking skill through Bloom’s taxonomy that implemented by teachers as well as students’ attempt to learn independently. “Students master different types or levels of objectives” in their learning [10]

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research method used in this study was descriptive qualitative approach that explored factors affecting students’ critical thinking development in EFL classroom. The sample of this study was eighth semester students of English Education Department at STKIP PGRI Tulungagung, totally 22 students. This study was conducted in Kabupaten Tulungagung, East Java Province, Indonesia.

Observation and interview were data collecting technique applied in this study. The observation was conducted to collect data of how the students performed their critical thinking during learning activities in classroom then the result had showed by the data was strengthen by conducting interview to the students to gain the data of factors affecting their critical thinking. The authors used observation guideline and guided interview list to provide deeper understanding related to factors affecting students’ critical thinking development in classroom. Triangulation was conducted to have strong validity of this study.

The observation in classroom was conducted in ten meetings, which each meeting was done once in a week. The earlier five meetings was conducted to discuss about how to write thesis proposal while another five meetings was conducted to give time to the students to present their thesis proposal in front of the class.

III. DISCUSSION

Based on the gathered and analysed data, the authors found that there were some factors affecting students’ critical thinking development in EFL classroom.

A. Teachers’ Role

The role of teacher in fact still plays an important factor that affect students’ learning achievement, including students’ critical thinking. Based on observation result it was clearly seen that teacher’s existence in classroom was still needed by the students in developing their critical thinking. The role of the teacher here was as facilitator who encourages the students to be active in learning activities in classroom. The teacher facilitates the students in the context of delivering the topic, guiding discussion, creating learning atmosphere that made students felt interested and excited to join the class and be active in learning process. The way the teacher did her role covers her ability to choose the teaching technique, strategy and media.

At the first five meetings the teacher performed her teaching technique by delivering the materials based on the lesson plan that has been arranged. The students, through the learning schedule had been given by the

teacher, were informed what kind of topic or materials and the time when it would be delivered and discussed in the classroom. It was expected that the students would prepare themselves to have background knowledge related to the topic that will be discussed so if they found problem, they could asked and discussed about it with the teacher and their classmates. During the class, teacher gave brief explanation about the topic and asked the students to made some questions and found the answer by discussing with their classmates. At first, the teacher asked the students to make small group to make some questions but it seemed that it was not effective way since there were some students who kept passive in learning activities. The teacher finally decided to change the discussion technique into classical discussion, which means that there were no more groups created which consisted of some students in each group, but it was classroom discussion where students could discuss and give their question, answer and opinion directly to other students and discussed it with their classmates without being limited by the boundary of created group. This teaching strategy worked well and the number of active students who participated in the discussion was improved.

In the end of the class, teacher asked the students whether or not they still had problems in understanding the materials they just had discussed. At first, it was found that only few students who said that they had no problem and unfortunately the rest students kept silent.

To overcome this problem, the teacher finally decided to apply technology as media to find out the students’ understanding related to the given materials. She used “plickers” application through her smartphone to have quick respond of the student as early assessment to find out whether the students understand the given materials or not. The way this plickers application worked was the teacher installed the application on her smartphone and connected it to the computer, where the same application had been installed as well, and input the students’ data that consisted of name and number code of each student through the application installed on the computer. The name of each student then would be displayed at the slide through LCD projector so all of the students could see the display of their name on the computer. The teacher should print out some barcode on pieces of papers and gave each barcode to the each student based on the number code she had arranged previously. The application installed on her smartphone would be used as scanner or QR reader.

This strategy worked well and made the students more active in learning activities. When the teacher gave questions to the students related to given materials they had learned and discussed every meeting as assessment in the end of the class, the students chose their answer by showing their printed out of barcode that would be scanned by the teacher using smartphone. The answer of each student would be displayed on the slide. It made the students very excited and they were very motivated to dig their comprehension of the materials by provide their background knowledge before the class was started. They admitted that this strategy pushed them to read more in

order to understand the materials that will be discussed every meeting.

This finding showed that the role of teacher as facilitator was really important and it must be supported by great performance of teaching, including the chosen technique or strategy and media. The use of technology supported teacher to have good management of classroom. So it was clearly that technology or digital literacy nowadays is very crucial to be mastered by a teacher to support his/her teaching activities. [11] Teaching strategy performed by the teacher was also play important role since it could guide students to think critically. [12]

The last five meetings were conducted to find out students' critical thinking through their thesis proposal that should be presented by each writer in front of the class. When a student was presenting his thesis proposal, other students should listen and give their opinion and even suggestion related to the topic had been delivered. In this activity, the role of the teacher was as facilitator to ensure the discussion run well and gave assessment and suggestion related to the content and students' performance when they were presenting their thesis proposal.

B. Students' Independent Learning

When the students were motivated to learn more related to the topic they were interested to write, they would do some effort to provide good learning result. The background knowledge the students have about the thesis proposal topic made them eager to dig more in order to get more comprehension. They became independent learner. They tried to find more information and reference through reading more articles and books related to the material, asking some teachers, discussing the topic with some classmates. As benefit of being independent learner they improved their academic performance, motivation and self-confidence. They became aware of their limitations and how to overcome their problem.[13] This activities made the students to be able to think critically. They learn how to get information, analyse and synthesize the information to have clearer and more valid understanding about the materials.

IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, the authors concluded that there were some factors affected students' critical thinking development in classroom. Teacher's role in managing and handling class as well as facilitator plays important role in developing students' critical thinking in teaching and learning activities. Besides teacher's role, students' independent learning plays crucial role in developing their critical thinking as well. The well combination of teacher as facilitator and students as learner will create student-centered learning that motivates and encourage the students to be able to think critically.

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