



Teaching Critical Thinking in English Subject

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Abstract

Critical Thinking (CT) has been recognized as one of the most significant thinking skills and indicators of students' learning quality. Enterprises need talents who can think critically to solve problems. Countries need to cultivate generations with independent personality and thinking capability to think out of the box. It has been proven by numbers of researchers that CT can be taught in class. To develop successful critical thinkers, CT must be incorporated into curriculum content and teaching approaches and sequenced at all grade levels. This research provides a review of the literature on teaching CT skills in English subject. The review discussed the importance of thinking skills, the integration of CT in language class, present studies on CT in English reading class and the need to train teachers to master CT skills. The results indicate teaching CT skills is of great value for English learners. The design of curriculum and training of teachers are crucial for learners' thinking skill development.

Keywords: Critical thinking, English language teaching, reading

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INTRODUCTION

Many researchers agreed that critical thinking (CT) skills are important in the learning process (Alfadhli, 2008; Fahim & Ahmadian, 2012). However, discussion on the concept of CT in education is still being argued upon. One of the concepts in CT was put forward by John Dewey (1916, cited in Fahim & Ahmadian, 2012), who perceived CT as a process that begins with a problem and ends with a solution and self-interpretation. Bean (2011, p. 3) elaborates on this point by stating that such a problem should 'evoke students' natural curiosity and stimulate both learning and critical thought'.

According to Facione (2010), CT is an aim-oriented activity and judgment that focus on the process of analyzing, evaluating explaining, self-regulating and conferencing abilities. Minakova (2014) thinks CT is a special kind of intellectual activity that allows people to evaluate the points of views suggested to them. Fitriani et al. (2019), believed that CT is the capability to think rationally and clearly about the things to do or believe. It is an independent and reflective thinking process. Critical thinkers are able to connect ideas logically, assess arguments objectively,



observe mistakes in reasoning, reflect on self-judgements and values consciously (Solihatin et al., 2020; Sudrajat et al., 2020). From these points of view, it can be concluded that CT is an active thinking process that requires conceptualizing, analysing, synthesizing, applying, and evaluating. In this kind of thinking, solving problems, formulating inferences, calculating likelihood, and making a decision are involved.

This study provides a systematic review of the literature on teaching CT skills in English language class focusing on published articles in academic journals. The rest of the article is organized as follows: First is the importance of thinking skills and CT skills in learning. The article then discusses the infusion of CT skill in language learning. Following that is CT and English reading. Lastly is the training of teachers to promote CT skills.

RESEARCH METHOD

The literature review was conducted through the following steps. First, searching for appropriate sources using Google Scholar and electronic databases from several academic fields such as education and psychology to identify CT-related articles (Hafnidar et al., 2021; Saputra et al., 2021). The search focused primarily on peer-reviewed theoretical and empirical studies on teaching students CT skills in English class. Following items and their combinations were used: 'thinking skill', 'critical thinking skills', 'teaching critical thinking skills', 'English learning'. Second, abstracts were read to screen the initial list of articles for the three topics (importance of thinking skills, CT skills in English class, teachers training in CT skills). These three topics were used to form the base of the present study. Third, each journal was read to identify the main points of view and results of the research. Finally, the views and findings were combined and organized under those three categories in a logical and compact way.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following section discussed the review related to thinking skills and the teaching of reading in English language classrooms.

Thinking Skills and Its Significance

Paul and Elder (2019) discussed the definition and importance of thinking skills in the book "The Art of Thinking – A Guide to Critical and Creative Thinking". They think that thinking is a purposeful mental activity over which we exercise some control. They stress that control is just like the steering controls the movement of a car. The movement of people's minds becomes thinking only when we direct it.

They also mentioned that thinking sometimes is unconscious and the unconscious mind can be directed with a purposeful activity. They stated that thinking is any mental activity that helps formulate or solve a problem, decide, or fulfil a desire to understand. It is researching for answers and reaching for meaning. These mental activities include observation, remembering, wondering, imagining, inquiring, evaluation, and making a judgment. To solve problems or make decisions, some of these mental activities needed to be combined. For instance, if

one needs to identify an idea, he or she needs questioning, analysing until a conclusion or decision is reached.

Other than the definition, Ruggiero (2014) discussed the nature of thinking. One of the most popular ones is the notion that thinking is verbal. It means when we think, we arrange our words silently. Some people's thinking consists more of images, therefore, the form of our thinking in our minds is not necessarily verbal. Paul and Elder (2019) explained that thinking skills are vital to successful problem solving and issue analysis. To solve problems or understand an issue, we need to have knowledge: historical context of the problem and relevant principles and concepts. This factual knowledge is something that exists or has been known. But in fact, there are a majority of cases and solutions which are still unknown. For this reason, only the possession of factual knowledge does not guarantee the success of problem-solving.

Therefore, Ruggiero (2014) insists that to be a successful problem-solver, one needs both factual knowledge and proficiency in thinking.

Thinking skills are involved in a variety of situations in our daily lives whenever we need to solve problems, analyse issues, and make decisions such as choosing the major to study at a university, buy a car for a family, choose a place to live, or religion to embrace and so on. We meet challenges every day. We need to deal with the difficulties in the relationship with colleagues, to learn how to balance working and taking care of family, to determine the political candidate that will do the most for the country. All these situations need proficient thinking skills to fulfil all these tasks.

It is not surprising to find that skills in problem-solving, issue analysis, and decision making is increasingly expected of employees (Fuller, 2017). With the advent of "quality management", employers have realized the power of employees who can make contributions in generating ideas for the improvement of the company. In recent years, this is reinforced by the development of technology revelation and the global economy (Rahman et al., 2022b; Utami et al., 2022).

As one of the most crucial thinking skills, CT plays a significant role in students' learning and self-development. It first encourages students' curiosity. Curiosity helps students to explore the surrounding and to understand the world they live. Effective thinkers remain curious about cultures, beliefs, views that are shared by humans. Critical thinking also enhances creativity. Critical thinkers are great creative thinkers. They have the desire and ability to solve problems in learning, life, and work creatively. This creativity helps them to generate more assumptions about many things. Instead of being limited by few choices, they can produce more solutions to difficulties.

Critical thinking strengthens students' problem - solving ability as well. Children today are the leaders tomorrow. They will have to face challenges using critical thinking skills. They need to become true critical thinkers to solve the complex problems that we human beings are facing like pollution, energy crisis, and global warming. In addition, critical thinkers are multi-skilled. By learning critical thinking skills, they can reason logically, analyse carefully, evaluate comprehensively. They are at the same time open-minded and can question, reflect, and make decisions. In short, critical thinking is not just for learning, it is a skill for life as well. It is expected that our students can be independent thinkers and can

achieve their success both in their study and their life (Tiara et al., 2021; Rahman et al., 2022a).

CT in Teaching English Subject

CT, instrumental motivation, and autonomy are assumed to be three major components of language learning (Huong et al., 2018). Many studies have proved that the English language and CT have a close relationship in the aspects of specific abilities like speaking, vocabulary, writing, translation, reading, and so forth. Leong and Ahmadi (2017) think speaking is the action of conveying information or expressing of ones' thoughts and feelings into spoken languages. Krebt (2017) thought that speaking is the process of building and sharing meaning using verbal or non-verbal symbols in a variety of contexts. Many pieces of research have been done to investigate the relationship between CT and speaking.

Afshar and Movassagh (2017) have researched the relationship between CT and speaking ability among EFL students at Payame Noor University in Iran. This research concerned whether language students who were critical thinkers performed better in their speaking ability or not. After a test named Lauren Starkey CT Test, they concluded that those English learners who were recognized as critical thinkers performed better in their speaking. Ahmed et al. (2019) investigated the relationship among CT, emotional intelligence, and speaking abilities of Iranian EFL learners. They found that CT and emotional intelligence are strong predictors of speaking abilities. Speakers with higher CT tend to have a stronger ability in speaking. This finding also indirectly suggested that improving students' CT has a positive influence on their speaking ability. Therefore, the researcher suggested that teachers need to encourage their students to be critical when they raise questions to produce more opportunities for them to speak.

Similarly, Sanavi and Tarighat, (2014) investigated the impact of teaching CT skills on the speaking proficiency of Iranian EFL learners. A mixed-method approach was employed with two groups of female Iranian intermediate EFL learners. The result indicated that teaching CT has a significantly positive impact on speaking proficiency. Ordem (2017) examined the aspects of CT dispositions of Turkish adult learners of English in a listening and speaking test. The findings showed that the quality of being inquisitive, truth-seeking, open-minded, and confident helps people to be more critical in speaking. Iman (2017) found using debate instruction in EFL classrooms contributes significantly to students' CT and speaking skills.

Vocabulary is another important part of English learning. Just as most of the educators have justified, the quality and quantity of EFL learners' language learning are determined, to a large extent by vocabulary knowledge. Nosratinia et al. (2015) studied the relationship among EFL learners' CT, autonomy, and the choice of vocabulary learning strategies. This research was done on 100 undergraduate EFL learners and found that there is a significant and positive relationship between EFL learner's autonomy and CT in a vocabulary learning context. Therefore, they suggested that EFL learners should be encouraged to develop strategies that are effective in their vocabulary learning. On the other hand, teachers should provide a large amount of language learning setting for the better performance of learners' CT and autonomy development.

Writing is an important skill needed by EFL learners. Writing is more challenging for them and the contribution of CT in writing cannot be ignored. Golpour (2014) investigated the relationship between the CT levels of EFL learners and their performance in different modes of writing. It was found that the high critical thinkers' writing was better in two modes of writing compared to the low critical thinkers. This finding helps the teachers to realize the effect of CT on the writing process. Journal is one of the commonly used approaches for EFL writing practices. Shaarawy, (2014) did quasi-experimental research on EFL undergraduate students in a private university in Egypt. The result indicated that journal writing contributes strongly to the development of CT skills in the experimental group.

Being a very challenging and complex process, translation calls for different skills and knowledge areas, and it is associated with various cognitive and CT abilities. Azin and Tabrizi (2016) conducted a study on the relationship between the CT ability of Iranian English translation students and their translation ability. They concluded that learners with more critical abilities were more successful in translation performance. The finding also highlighted the importance of teaching thinking skills to language learners and the infusion of problem-solving and other CT skills in the language teaching process.

CT in Teaching Reading Comprehension

CT is a strategy used in an educational setting to make students critical. According to some researches, incorporating CT into English reading contributes to better performance of the student's reading performance. Kamgar and Jadidi (2016) explored the relationship of Iranian EFL CT and self-regulation with their reading comprehension ability. In this correlational quantitative research, participants were university students who were studying English language and English literature. They were divided into three groups namely beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels based on their scores in the reading comprehension placement test. Then two questionnaires about CT and self-regulation were distributed to three groups of participants. After analysis of the data, the researchers concluded that there was a correlation between EFL students' CT and their reading comprehension ability, but there was no significant relationship between self-regulation and reading comprehension ability among beginner and intermediate students. This finding supported the positive influence of CT on reading comprehension ability. They stressed that CT and reading comprehension ability are interrelated features: learners with less CT have poor comprehension.

Zhou et al. (2015) did another research to find effective approaches to improve the reading of EFL learners of colleges in China. He found that Chinese college students are busy reading piles of materials to prepare for tests, and they read very fast to get the main information. Non-critical readers tend to memorize the fact mentioned only and completely accept the ideas without thinking and analysing but critical readers would read and analyse at the same time. He mentioned that CT is an analytic activity, and it involves bringing outside knowledge and values into the reading material to come to a new idea. He analysed the reasons that he always heard the complaint from college students about the difficulties in reading are lack of culture and background knowledge; difficulties in

grammar; reading habits and skills. Therefore, he suggested critical reading be used in college teaching. In his suggestion, there are five steps: pre-reading, reading in context, further understanding, further thinking and reflections after reading, outlining, and summarizing.

Yousefi and Mohammadi (2016) studied the role of CT skills in EFL learners' reading comprehension among postgraduate students in Iran. The participants are graduate students in translation and English language teaching at Islamic Azad University. Instruments used are TOEFL papers and the CT Appraisal. After collecting and analysis of the data, they concluded that there is a significant relationship between their CT and reading comprehension. They also found that there is no significant difference between males and females regarding the relationship between CT and reading comprehension skill of the postgraduate students. Based on the result of the research, they firmly believe CT skills should be incorporated into academic studies. Therefore, they strongly suggested that university professors be attentive to integrating CT skills into their teaching of reading in universities (Nengsih et al., 2022).

Hosseini et al. (2012) investigated the impact of CT skills on the reading comprehension of EFL learners. The participants were randomly divided into experimental and control groups. These two groups were exposed to a pre-test of reading comprehension to evaluate their reading proficiency. Then, treatment of CT was given to the experimental group while traditional instruction was given to the control group. After the analysis of the collected data, the result showed that teaching CT skills positively affects the reading comprehension of EFL learners.

Tang (2016) found college EFL students were able to speak well in English but failed to generate deep ideas and solve problems in practice, which was caused by teaching that merely focused on memorizing, imitating, and reciting. He believed that CT was fundamental for innovation and therefore designed research to foster college students' CT skills by designing various activities in the intensive reading course in the English classroom.

Tang (2016) developed three sections namely the before-class section, in-class section, and after-class section. In the first two sections, the researcher used brainstorming discussion to open students' minds in discussing topics, and then questions were raised in different steps and situations. During this process, students needed to either evaluate, make rational decisions, and analyse, or they needed to integrate and criticize among different situations. Finally, the researcher assigned a writing task for students to cultivate and reinforce their CT. In this process, students were asked to use powerful supporting ideas in their arguments, which would reflect their understanding of the topics discussed in class.

Tang (2016) strongly believed that students' CT can be cultivated and improved through explicit instruction and practice in integrated English reading courses. During his sample courses, students were able to come up with different challenging, independent and innovative ideas. He also believed that even though CT requires a long period, it is worthwhile to develop students' cognitive and intellectual practice. Therefore, teachers need to change their teaching believes to in cultivating students' thoughts instead of promoting students' language competitiveness only (Adam et al., 2022; Handrianto et al., 2021a). In the suggestion for further research, the researcher suggested more case studies identify

the activities and the strategies that can be employed in CT development in the EFL reading classroom.

Zhou et al. (2015) investigated the CT ability of non-English major's students in a university in China. The research specifically compared students' CT ability in English reading between students of different gender and majors as well as grades. The 224 participants were randomly selected. They used a questionnaire on CT Ability in English Reading. Based on the analysis of data, they concluded: the ability of non-English major freshmen and sophomores was relatively weak, especially on the aspects of providing arguments and self-regulation. They also found that: female students were better at CT and the male student's lack abilities of analysing and inferencing; art majors were superior to the science majors; sophomores were superior to the freshmen. According to the research result, the researchers suggested that university students need to develop reading interest, enlarge background knowledge and be more positive in expressing their views from various aspects and defend them. Teachers on the other hand need to improve their teaching method and emphasize arousing students' CT awareness (Muslim et al., 2019; Siang et al., 2020a). In English reading class, students should be inspired to thinking critically.

As a most-used English ability, reading plays a quite important role not only in examinations but also in daily learning and working. This research aims to enable students to get to know and master CT skills in English reading classes. The various reading materials provide students with the context, in which they can learn to analyse, and generalize. On the other hand, CT skills will benefit students in their reading ability in return. Students will learn CT skills and they will also be more competent in their English performance.

Importance of Teachers' Training

As has been suggested in the above research, CT has a significantly positive influence on EFL learners. Therefore, it is vital to cultivate students' thinking ability in teaching and it is where the importance of teachers' training comes in. Demirhan & Köklükaya (2014) evaluated the CT disposition of some prospective science teachers in Turkey. They used a survey research method by using California CT Disposition Inventory (CCTDI). The participants are 309 students who are enrolled in a public university. In the result, they concluded that the CT dispositions of prospective science teachers were in general at medium and low levels.

Aun and Wareerat (2016) conduct research to evaluate an instructional model to enhance CT and the ability to think critically among trainee students in Cambodia. This research was done with 15 trainee students who major in English and Khmer. The developed instructional model consisted of six main components: principle, objective, learning content, learning instruction, learning materials, and evaluation. There were eight steps in the learning instruction: triggering activity, identifying the problem, investigating related data, discussing findings, evaluating the findings, creating solutions, presenting solutions, and reflecting on solutions. The result of the research showed trainee students' learning participation in all CT activities was at a proficient level. It also indicated that trainee students' CT ability was generally at the exemplary level. There are still some challenges that the trainee students met (Siang et al., 2020b).

Evidently, the promotion of CT will never be done without the adoption of proper critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy should be included in the curriculum of English teacher education to enable students to have broader and critical insights into society and politics (Hayati, 2015; Handrianto et al., 2021b). In their research, they examined the concepts of critical pedagogy concerning EFL and how those concepts of critical pedagogy are applied as well as those challenges teachers encountered in implementing it. They finally suggested the courses need to engage students in learning activities that involve problem-solving and reflective thinking. The adoption of critical pedagogy in EFL should be advocated because teachers themselves need to be master the pedagogy. They need to be empowered before they can empower others.

Like other initiatives, the teaching of thinking has its share of criticism and problems and many issues need to be addressed. For instance, teachers' lack of experience and resources; they need extra energy and space in teaching and studying thinking skills, and the important role curriculum plays in the teaching of thinking. The teaching of thinking is still encountering many realistic issues and problems at present. Teachers are not well prepared due to the limited experience and resources; they also need more space and flexibility to handle their teaching materials; the present curriculum also needed to adjust to fit the new teaching objectives for teaching of thinking.

CONCLUSION

In the 20th century, critical thinking is one of the most emphasized skills and researchers have reached a consensus about the importance of promoting critical thinking skills in education. However, in the context of language teaching, the implementation of critical thinking skills is a less explored area, particularly in justifying its process. There are five categories of reasons to support the integration of critical thinking in language classes: philosophical reasons, cognitive and meta-cognitive reasons, pedagogical reasons, and social-economic reasons. A language is a tool for people's thinking. The grammatical and lexical structure of language influence people's thinking and their perspectives of the world. On the other hand, because of the inter-relationship when people's thinking developed, their language also developed. For the cognitive reason, he argued that the component and process of critical thinking are closely related to some important cognitive activities like memory, comprehension, and meta-cognition. In the context of pedagogical reason, information processing, decision making, evaluation, and problem-solving are used currently in English teaching and they are also some core components in critical thinking. Lastly, he believed that promoting students' critical thinking ability has a fundamental meaning for social communication and career development. Because people equipped with critical thinking tend to be more efficient in communication as well as completing their tasks in work.

To summarize, although the teaching of critical thinking in language classes still needs great effort in exploration, it is hard to ignore the advantages. Because the interrelationship between critical thinking and language has a positive influence on learners' learning outcome, which is significant for them. In learning critical thinking skills, learners also get to know many cognitive skills like metacognition. Learning critical thinking can enable learners to learn more core critical thinking

skills such as evaluation and decision making as well. These skills are also very helpful for learners' life and career.

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