

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the background of the study, statements of the problems, objectives of the study, significance of the study, scope and limitation of the study, and definition of key terms.

1.1 Background of the study

Critical thinking is an important set of skills that are well-known all over the world. Every school and educator try their best to introduce critical thinking skills to the student since their young age. Many articles and reports describe that it is the most wanted and desirable skills for major companies when looking for new employees. Why are critical thinking skills really important? Scriven & Paul (2007) stated that critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by observation, experience, reflection, reasoning or communication as a guide to belief and action. World Economic Forum also reported that the demand of critical thinking in the world's societies is constantly increasing. These evidences show how critical thinking skills are considered really important all over the world.

Teaching critical thinking skill has been a major goal in most schools throughout the world, especially at the university level when each of the students should develop higher order thinking skill. Unfortunately, due to lack of competent teachers and educators, and due to people's unfamiliarity with critical thinking skills, these skills are not getting much attention in Indonesia. The major problem with the lack of critical thinkers in Indonesia is mostly linked to education inequalities. In some rural areas of Indonesia, there is a shortage of competent educators. According to the research conducted by the Indonesian Ministry of Education, most Indonesian teachers only passed the teacher competency test with the score 44 to 46 whereas the standard to passed is 70. With this condition, critical thinking activities could not be implemented in the school since the schools were lack of facilities and competent educators. Besides the facilities and educators, Nilan (2003) found that Indonesian pupils are encouraged to learn by rote and produce lists of facts in compulsory examinations, an approach which neither stimulates creativity not provides better foundations in English, mathematics and computer skills, all of which are needed to develop a globally competitive economy (p.566). These deficiencies caused education inequalities in Indonesia, from the

data the Ministry of Education added in 2017, they revealed that there were 20.000 improper schools all over Indonesia.

Clement (1979) said “It is important to teach the students how to learn and not only told them to learn, we should be teaching students how to think, instead of teaching them what to think”. Moreover, Norman (1981) appends “it is strange that we expect students to learn, yet seldom teach them anything about learning”. It would be a serious issue in the development of education if educators neglect the importance of critical thinking skills. It is critical thinking skills that help teachers to shape their student’s mind to be critical, analytical, intellectual, flexible and creative. Critical thinkers also would most likely to be a better citizen that later could bring change and progress for the country. As proposed in www.criticalthinking.org, critical thinking, understood as skills alone separate from values, is often used to rationalize prejudice and vested interest.

Based on that theories, educators and schools in Indonesia are now starting to be aware of the importance of teaching critical thinking skills. They applied various teaching methods that sharpen student’s critical thinking. The most common used method is problem-based learning. According to Kompas (2018) an article by Idris Apandi, following the K-13 curriculum, educators in Indonesia were trained to applied scientific approach and HOTS (Higher order thinking skill). Besides scientific approach, educators have to applied 4C (communication, collaboration, critical thinking and creative & innovative). These evidences show a significant change on Indonesian people’s awareness about critical thinking. In order to prepare the Indonesian human capital to face the new industrial era, which is Industrial Revolution 4.0, critical thinking skills are crucially needed. Critical thinking needs to be taught to students in order “that they will be equipped to compete effectively for educational opportunities, jobs, recognition, and rewards in today’s world” (Nickerson, 1987, p. 30). In recent years The Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC) has started to involve activities related to improving critical thinking skills in the school competences. According to the 2016 Permendikbud No. 20 the expected competences for students to develop after graduating from high school are; acquiring skills on thinking and act of 1. Creativity, 2. Productivity, 3. Critical Thinking 4. Independence, 5. Collaboration, and 6. Communication. Moreover, Indonesian MOEC requires teachers to integrate critical thinking in their teaching (Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture, 2019) which obliged Indonesian educators to learn and develop the skills in order to transfer the knowledge to their students.

Realizing the importance of critical thinking skills, not only educators should create creative materials that involve critical and higher-order thinking skills activities, teachers also need to encourage the students in order to promote the skills. Potts (1994) proposes on her journal that the recognized hallmarks of teaching critical thinking include; (1) promoting interaction among students as they learn. (2) Asking open-ended questions that do not assume the “one right answer”. (3) Allowing sufficient time for students to reflect on the questions asked or problems posed. (4) Teaching for transfer-the skills for critical thinking should “travel well” when the teachers provide opportunities for the students to see how a newly acquired skill can apply to other situations and to the student’s own experience. Critical thinking in the classroom is facilitated by a physical and intellectual environment that encourages a spirit of discovery (Keefe & Walberg, 1992).

In order to encourage the students to learn the skills, teachers should facilitate the students. The teacher’s competence plays a significant role in the learning activity. As Ahmad et al (2013) stated, students’ lack of confidence is also caused by a teaching strategy which does not conform to students’ learning styles and cultural backgrounds. Besides that, teachers and students always center the learning activity on math and science problem which have little resemblance to the way problems look in real life. Instead, teachers should drive the students to one of the most practical thinking skills which is finding problems. Potts (1994) states the finding problems strategy is a way of framing tasks so that students use skills similar to those needed for the ill-defined problems they will encounter in life. Moreover, teachers could set the environment and the settings of the classroom so that the students are encouraged to ask questions and could interact actively. A study found that the seating arrangements in the classroom could help students to develop critical thinking skills. When the seatings were arranged, the students could share “stage” with the teacher and they could interact with each other, this helps to minimize the passive, receptive mode many students adopt when all facing the teacher (Potts, 1994). Studies found varied facilities that could help the students to learn the skills and one of them is through writing.

Writing activity involves higher-order thinking skills. As Bissel and Lemons stated writing engages application – analysis – synthesis and evaluation which characterize higher-order thinking skills. Higher-order thinking skills promote higher order learning skills which in turn enable students to reach higher levels of language proficiency (Renner, 1996). Writing does not only require the mastery of linguistic such as grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, but also requires the conceptual judgement and critical thinking (Heaton, 1989, p.135). Active

learning strategies, such as journal writing, small groups and case studies can enable students to improve their critical thinking abilities while they learn the content of their chosen discipline (Todd & Hudson, 2007). In addition to effective writing skills, Burbach, Matkin & Fritz (2004) state that employers expect employees to possess critical thinking skills ability. This statement shows the relation between critical thinking skills and writing ability. Teachers must teach students to identify vital questions and problems, gather and synthesize relevant information, develop and substantiate well-thought-out conclusions and communicate their findings to appropriate audiences (Todd & Hudson, 2004) and in order to do that, students should do extensive work on reading, analyzing, problem solving and decision making which characterize skills of critical thinking before producing their piece of writing.

In conclusion, critical thinking and writing ability are closely related. Even though some people doubt the relationship between these two, both critical thinking skills and writing skill are important and needed for the student's future and their life development later. Critical thinking skills could help with students' writing assignments because as Fliegel and Hollan, 2011 said, writing is a process through which students can practice and apply their critical thinking since it requires them to collect, analyze, synthesize and evaluate information. Undergraduates are expected to master critical thinking skills during their college education, regardless of discipline (Greenlaw and DeLoach, 2003). Thus, critical writing in higher education is essential because students in higher education are required to be able to go beyond basic writing into more advanced elements of critical thinking (Nariza & Salam, 2014). In addition, with the help of critical thinking and writing skills, students are expected to be able to survive through real-world problems. In this study, the researcher focuses on studying how critical thinking skills could be taught through writing. The researcher wants to know whether the students experience positive changes after learning the skills and whether students could really acquire the skills after joining the Writing D class. This research would involve students of English Education Study Program at Widya Mandala Catholic University batch 2018.

1.2 Statement of The Problem

The main purpose of the study is to know whether critical thinking skills are taught by lecturers during Writing D class. The questions formulated are performed below;

1. To what extent do Writing D lecturers teach critical thinking skills as perceived by the students?

2. To what extent are Writing D students learning about critical thinking skills?
3. Do critical thinking skills affect student's writing skills in Writing D class as perceived by the students?

1.3 Objectives of The Study

From the problem statement above, the main objective of the study is to investigate whether the lecturers taught the students critical thinking skills through writing class and to know whether the students learned about critical thinking skills during Writing D class.

This objective of the study is to examine:

- (1) To know the student's perception about learning critical thinking skills in Writing D class.
- (2) To find whether critical thinking skills taught by Writing D lecturers are found to be beneficial as perceived by the students.

1.4 Significance of The Study

The writer hopes that this study will help and bring benefits to students and teachers or educators who are studying or teaching about critical thinking skills and writing.

1. Student

With this research hopefully students all over Indonesia could be more aware of the presence of critical thinking skills and the importance of it. Therefore, the writer hopes that students could also develop writing skills that will bring many benefits later for their education and professional career life.

2. Teacher and Educators

Through this study, the writer hopes that teachers and educators in Indonesia would put more attention to the importance of critical thinking skills and writing skill. Hopefully teachers could implement the skills to school subjects and creatively involving critical thinking skills in class activity.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

This study is supported by the theory of critical thinking skills, higher-order thinking skills and writing skills as briefly presented below;

Nunan (2003: 88) stated that writing is the mental work of inventing ideas, thinking about how to express them, and organizing them into statements and paragraphs that will be clear to a reader. Rivers (1981: 294) stated that writing is conveying information or expression of original ideas in a consecutive way in the new language.

Larsson (2017) conducted an empirical study regarding critical thinking topic. His research limited critical thinking in four qualities of a person: abilities to (1) Identify conclusions, reasons and assumptions. (2) Judge the quality of an argument, including the acceptability of its reasons, assumptions and evidence. (3) Develop and defend a position on an issue. (4) Draw conclusions when warranted, but with caution. Facione, P. A. (2011: 22) proposed critical thinking as purposeful, reflective judgment which manifests itself in reasoned consideration of evidence, context, methods, standards, and conceptualizations in deciding what to believe or what to do.

According to Heong, et al (2011) higher order thinking is using the thinking widely to find new challenge. Brookhart (2010: 5) stated that higher-order thinking belongs to of as the top end of the Bloom's cognitive taxonomy. The teaching goal behind any of the cognitive taxonomies is equipping students to be able to do transfer.

1.6 Limitation and The Scope of The Study

This study is mainly focusing on examining student's perception in learning critical and problem-solving skills during Writing D class at Widya Mandala English Department program. This research will be conducted during the Writing D class of 2018 academic year students and expected to be followed by 20 to 30 participants.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

Here are some further explanation and meaning of certain words mentioned in the introduction above:

- **Reasoning:** Sangeet Khemlani (2018) defines reasoning as the processes that occur between the point when reasoners attend to salient, meaningful information (linguistic or perceptual) and when they draw one or more conclusions based on that information.
- **Analyzing:** According to Thomas Baldwin (1998) in his Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Analyzing means a method of inquiry in which one seeks to assess complex systems of thought by analyzing them into simpler elements whose relationships are thereby brought into focus
- **Synthesizing:** According to Benjamin Bloom synthesizing is a skill involving building a structure or pattern from diverse elements
- **Evaluating:** According to Benjamin Bloom evaluating is making judgments based on criteria and standards through checking and critiquing. Critiques, recommendations, and reports are some of the products that can be created to demonstrate the processes of evaluation.
- **Problem-solving:** According to Richard E. Meyer (2013) is cognitive processing directed at achieving a goal when the problem solver does not initially know a solution method.
- **Decision Making:** According to E. Mc. Farland decision is an act of choice wherein an executive form a conclusion about what must be done in a given situation. A decision represents a behavior chosen from a number of possible alternatives
- **Flexibility:** Cañas et al. 2003 defined cognitive flexibility is the human ability to adapt the cognitive processing strategies to face new and unexpected conditions in the environment.
- **Creativity:** Creativity according to Robert. E Franken in Human Motivation is the tendency to generate or recognize ideas, alternatives, or possibilities that may be useful in solving problems, communicating with others, and entertaining ourselves and others
- **Writing D:** Writing D is a writing class in Widya Mandala Catholic University. This writing class consists of 4 levels from A to D and Writing D is the highest level.