

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

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This chapter introduces the study. It explains the background of the study, states the problems and the objectives of conducting the study. Theoretical framework, the assumptions and the significance of the study are also given here. The explanations on the scope of the study, definition of key terms and organization of the thesis are presented afterwards.

### **1.1 Background of the study**

The aim of the present study is to find out the critical thinking skill as manifested in the student- generated questions and the students' answers to teacher's provided questions in reading an English text. The motivation for the study came from the fact that students need to have critical thinking skill since this mental skill is very useful to help them analyze and find a solution of their academic problems as well as problems that they will encounter in their lives. This is in line with the Indonesian National 2004 Curriculum which is called "competency- based curriculum". This curriculum intends to enhance students' critical thinking. It is explicitly stated by suggesting "whole education" and "life-long education" in which learners should learn not only academic skills but also life skills and the vocational skills, and have the spirit of learning for the whole of their lives.

Critical thinking means correct thinking in the pursuit of relevant and reliable knowledge about the world (Schafersman, 1991:3). Another way to describe it is reasonable, reflective, responsible, and skillful thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do. A person who thinks critically can ask appropriate questions, gather information, efficiently and creatively sort through this information, reason logically from this information, and come to reliable and trustworthy conclusions about the world that enable one to live and act successfully in it.

According to Devine (1981:98) critical thinking is not innate. Children are not born with the power to think critically, nor do they develop this ability naturally beyond survival-level thinking. Critical thinking is a learned ability that can be taught. One can learn how to continually improve the quality of his or her thinking, but most individuals never learn it by themselves. Only trained and knowledgeable teachers or instructors are able to impart this skill.

Critical thinking is needed to process information whether it is in written or oral form. Many reading theorists believe in the importance of critical thinking skill. According to McWhorter (1992:243), people tend to be much more tolerant and accepting in reading. Many readers readily accept information and ideas presented in written form without careful evaluation. Obviously, this passive attitude harms the readers themselves. She suggests that the readers must be critical in reading starting with the full awareness that everything they read must be written from a particular perspective; thus the writer's subjective opinion, value, attitude and ideology are implicitly and explicitly recorded in it. For there are always chances for a writer to

be biased, Milan (1983:185) also strongly argues that it is not enough for the readers to have only a good fundamental ability to comprehend well without having the ability to develop critical sense, that is a means of judging the worth of what is being read. In addition, Goatly (2000:159) emphasizes that only by having self resistance and challenging the writer's beliefs and assumptions all the time in reading, the readers could maintain enough sense of belonging to remain mentally healthy.

A text interpretation is made by the readers themselves. Therefore, critical readers are the ones who actively understand and evaluate the text they read. In reading a text, the readers must continuously question the ideas presented in the text. It is supported by Randall's statement (2002) which says that to start critical thinking someone has to use the strategy of discovering what organizational format his or her reading has used. Furthermore, she explains that if one has been practicing asking questions about the material he/she is reading, especially questions which analyze, hypothesize, or evaluate, then he/she is also in a very good position to think critically. And, if he/she has discovered some of the central ideas in the readings he/she has done, he/she can begin thinking critically. Critical readers do not unquestioningly accept everything they read just because it is in print or reject a writer's idea simply because they dislike or disagree with what he says or the way he says it, but they must be able to form their own opinion, ideas and judgments (Milan, 1983:185). Only by thinking critically on the problems or issues on the text can readers keep themselves "sane", not merely feel or do what the writer wants them to feel and do.

However, Kurland (2000:1) distinguishes critical reading and critical thinking. in the following way: critical reading is a technique for discovering information and ideas within a text, while critical thinking is a technique for evaluating information and ideas, for deciding what to accept and believe. Critical reading refers to a careful, active, reflective, analytic reading. Critical thinking involves reflecting on the validity of what we have read in light of our prior knowledge and understanding of the world. By these definitions, critical reading would appear to come before critical thinking. He considers that the distinction between critical reading and critical thinking is useful as a reminder that the readers must read each text on its own merit, not imposing their prior knowledge or views on it. While they must evaluate ideas as that read, they must not distort the meaning within a text and force a text to say what they would like it to say; otherwise they will never learn anything. As a conclusion, there is a close relationship between critical reading and critical thinking. In reality, they work together as stated by Kurland (2000:2) that only once the readers have fully understood a text (critical reading) can they truly evaluate its assertions (critical thinking)

Being totally aware of the importance of students to have critical thinking skill, the researcher attempts to conduct a study investigating the critical thinking skill as manifested in the student- generated questions and the students' answers to teacher's provided questions while they are reading. This study involves the fifth semester students of the English Department of Wijaya Kusuma Surabaya University. During the research the students are not taught how to think critically

while reading a passage. However, they have learnt it undeliberately in their reading classes. It is done to keep the result of the research genuine -not influenced by their schemata on critical thinking strategies. One pilot class has been chosen for try-out the test to measure the appropriateness of the text, the students' ability to generate critical questions and the number of questions they can make at given time, and their ability to answer the given questions before the real test is conducted to the sampling groups. The researcher hopes that the findings of her study can be taken by all concerned people especially the teachers and the curriculum makers of language to consider and justify the importance of encouraging critical thinking in all levels of education.

## **1.2 Statements of the problems**

This study is done to question the following points:

The major problem:

1. How is the students' critical thinking skill as manifested in the student-generated questions and the students' answers to teacher's provided questions in reading an English text?

The statement of the problem above is elaborated into the following minor statements of the problems:

1.1 Do the student-generated questions reflect the students' critical thinking?

1.2 Do the students' answers to teacher's provided questions reflect the students' critical thinking?

1.3 How do the student-generated questions correlate to the students' answers to teacher's provided questions?

1.4 Is critical thinking gender-specific?

### **1.3 Objectives of the study**

Based on the statement of the problems, this study is done with the following objectives:

1. To describe the students' critical thinking skill as manifested in the student-generated questions and the students' answers to teacher's provided questions in reading an English text?

1.1 To describe whether the student-generated questions reflect the students' critical thinking.

1.2 To describe whether the students' answers to teacher's provided questions reflect the students' critical thinking.

1.3 To describe the correlation of the student-generated questions and the students' answers to teacher's provided questions

1.4 To describe whether critical thinking is gender-specific.

### **1.4 Significance of the study**

This study is obviously worth doing for at least two purposes. Theoretically, this study is expected to provide the curriculum makers and the teachers a new better perspective and to broaden their minds in encouraging the critical thinking skills of

the students. The findings of this study are expected to give the curriculum makers and the teachers of the English Department of Wijaya Kusuma Surabaya University an illustration on the critical thinking skills of the students especially in comprehending texts.

Moreover, this study is expected to give practical contributions to the teachers to find better ways to enhance students' critical thinking skills. Critical thinking enables an individual to cope every problem he/she encounters in his/her life as well as to live and act successfully in the world. Critical thinking is not innate (Devine, 1981:98). It is a learned ability that must be taught. Instead of spoon-feeding the students, helping them to "think through" in every task or assignment is crucial in enhancing their critical thinking skills. Based on this consideration, this study intends to highlight the importance of encouraging critical thinking in all levels of education.

### **1.5 Theoretical Framework**

Critical thinking is reasonable, reflective, responsible, and skillful thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do (Schafersman, 1991:3). A person who thinks critically can ask appropriate questions, gather information, efficiently and creatively sort through this information, reason logically from this information, and come to reliable and trustworthy conclusions about the world that enable one to live and act successfully in it. In addition, a critical thinking is someone who is able to think well and fair mindedly about his or her own beliefs and viewpoints as well



as those which are diametrically opposed (Paul, 2004). The critical thinker does not just think about these beliefs and viewpoints, but explores and appreciates their adequacy, cohesion, and reasonableness.

Thinking is not driven by answers but by questions (Paul, 2004). If there had been no questions asked by those who laid the foundation for a field, it would never have been developed in the first place. Furthermore, Paul and Elder (1996) state that every field stays alive only to the extent that fresh questions are generated and taken seriously as the driving force in a process of thinking.

To think through or rethink anything, one must ask questions that stimulate his or her thought. Questions define tasks, express problems and delineate issues. Answers on the other hand, often signal a full stop in thought. Only when an answer generates a further question does thought continue its life as such (Thoms, 2001). This is why it is true that only students who have questions are really thinking and learning. It is possible to give students an examination on any subject by just asking them to list all of the questions that they have about a subject, including all questions generated by their first list of questions.

This research investigates the students' critical thinking while they are reading a text. Therefore; this study is based on critical thinking process proposed by Devine (1981: 103-110) since each of the processes could be turned into a corresponding critical reading skill. The questions that can reflect the students' critical thinking are categorized into some inter-related parts: recognizing the

writer's purpose, noting special points of view, being aware of the writer's choice of language, evaluating the writer's argument, and evaluating inferences.

### **1.6 Assumptions**

This study is based on the following assumptions:

- 1). The students have more experiences in reading English texts since they are the fifth semester students who have got reading classes in the previous semesters.
- 2). The kinds of questions generated by the students can be used to identify their critical thinking in reading an English text

### **1.7 Scope of the Study**

This study is limitedly done to investigate the critical thinking skill through the student- generated questions and the students' answers to teacher's provided questions which will be related to critical thinking process proposed by Devine (1981:103-110) which is turned into five inter-related parts: recognizing the writer's purpose, noting special points of view, being aware of the writer's choice of language, evaluating the writer's argument, and evaluating inferences.

The text on which the students will perform their critical thinking skill is also under certain limitations. First, the text used in this study is non-fiction and it is an argumentative reading passage since it widely exposes the writer's ideas, opinions, and thoughts which provide ample opportunities for students to generate critical

being aware of the writer's choice of language, evaluating the writer's argument, and evaluating the writer's conclusion while reading in order to actively question and judge the worth of the text being read (Devine, 1981: 103-110)

- c. *Critical reading* refers to a careful, active and analytic reading which is focused on discovering information and ideas within a text (Kurland, 2000)
- d. *Student-generated questions* are essay-type questions made by the students while reading an English text.
- e. *Critical questions* are questions, which analyze, hypothesize, or evaluate ideas or problems, that stimulate one's thought (Randal, 2002).
- f. *Argumentative reading passage*: a passage that contains of the author's opinions and beliefs on a certain topic.

## **1.9 Organization of the Thesis**

The report of this study is organized into five chapters. The first chapter gives the background of the study. The second chapter provides the related literature that explains and supports this study. Chapter three discusses the methodology of the study. The results of this study and their interpretation, however, will be presented in chapter four. Finally, chapter five gives the summary of the study and some suggestions.