

INCORPORATING ARGUMENTATION STUDY FOR TEACHING CRITICAL THINKING IN EFL INSTRUCTION: A PROPOSAL FOR EFL CURRICULUM

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Abstract

This paper elucidates some urgent reasons why critical thinking (CT) instruction is worth-integrating into EFL instruction in the context of Indonesian higher education. The center idea promotes the dialectical stages of argumentation study as the core activities in EFL classrooms to cultivate students' critical and analytical spirit. The stages as making inferences; recognizing assumptions, opinions, and arguments; making deduction; making interpretation; and evaluating and analyzing arguments are transformed into discrete activities to develop and improve students' critical thinking skills. Further, each component of dialectical stages of argumentation study are highlighted to inspire EFL teachers how the components can be well-integrated into EFL instruction. Two ways of teaching CT instruction are proposed: 1) infusion of thinking skills activities into subjects in the regular curriculum, and 2) separate programs for teaching critical thinking across curriculum.

I. INTRODUCTION

Perhaps most importantly in today's information age, thinking skills are viewed as crucial for educated persons to cope with a rapidly changing world. Many educators believe that specific knowledge will not be as important to tomorrow's workers and citizens as the ability to learn and make sense of new information. --D. Gough, 1991

The quotation above is only one of famous statements reflecting how critical thinking has actually been a major issue of educators from diverse countries in the world. Recently, these two magic words of 'Critical Thinking' (CT) have also infected and inspired some of educators in Indonesia. It has been well-proven, at least, by some of the presenters in this conference who share the same reflection upon the importance and the power of critical thinking. This fact indicates that the concept and its implementation has gradually found its place in the context of higher education in Indonesia.

There are at least two reasons, in my observation, why the notion of critical thinking has started to color the life of Indonesian education system. First, at this moment our nation has been experiencing the euphoria of having differences of opinions as one aspect of democracy. We are now accustomed to seeing or witnessing many strikes or

demonstrations in many parts of regions in Indonesia; phenomena that we never saw or even experienced before in the previous time. People are now liberated to freely express any unjust situations happening to them. This current fact has slowly but sure trained the inhabitants of this nation to be more skeptical and critical, and therefore urged some of educational practitioners to seek for a way to cultivate Indonesian students' critical thinking skills. Second, the fact that Indonesian education system now needs a new vision to deal with the globalization era. As stated by Prof. Dr. Bungaran Saragih, rector of Pelita Harapan University, on his opening speech for the National Seminar on Indonesian Education in 2004, Indonesian higher education indeed needs to grow the culture of scientific mind, scientific behavior, and scientific problem solving. Further, he emphasized that it is undeniable that scientific problem solving is not yet part of the culture of our educational institutions. Most of our higher education institutions are still struggling with some classical problems that as if never come to an end. Such problems as the quality of teaching staff, the inappropriate salary received, lecturers' inability to update themselves in their respective fields, lecturers' failure to do research and to write books or articles, and the shortage of sufficient facilities have remained the major problems. The portray of our higher education system is still dominated by the Banking Concept of Education, and therefore, the classroom atmosphere is solely the reflection of teaching instead of learning. The system and method applied tend to run in one-way communication in which: 1) lecturers teach, students are therefore to be taught, 2) lecturers know a lot of things, students do not know anything, 3) lecturers are thinking and students are the objects being thought, 4) lecturers tell stories and students listen carefully, 5) lecturers determine the rules and students follow the rules, 6) lecturers select the teaching materials and students have to agree with the selection, 7) lecturers do the learning process and students imagine the learning process through the lecturers' learning actions. In brief, this concept puts students as the object rather than the subject of the teaching-learning process. However, in some big cities, I believe that some schools and universities have left behind this concept. School and university students have started developing their critical thinking skills. The mushrooming debating forums and communities have signed this new trend . Even the Education and Culture Department in some provinces, including in D.I. Yogyakarta, has regularly organized an English

Debating competition for high school students. While, in the university level, Indonesian university students have established a society which annually arranges Inter-Varsity English Debating Championship. If currently non-English department students have come to their path to train and to gain their critical thinking skills through debating, now it is time for us, as English lecturers, to spread the same virus to our English students.

To better disseminate the development of critical thinking skills, this paper promotes the idea of incorporating the argumentation study elements into EFL instruction to form critical literacy in the context of Indonesian higher education. There are five areas of argumentation study that are worth-incorporating into EFL instruction: 1) making inferences, 2) recognizing assumptions, opinions, and arguments, 3) making deduction, 4) making interpretation, 5) evaluating and analyzing arguments. The idea of critical literacy in EFL instruction is proposed with the consideration that critical thinking disposition is essentially to possess by every individual. This disposition has in fact been acknowledged as part of education character (Orr and Klein, 1991). This character generates the critical spirit which has been the major concern and quest since the golden age of ancient Greece as the beginning of this interest. Nowadays, the ability to engage in careful and reflective thought has been valued as a fundamental characteristic of an educated person, as a requirement for responsible citizenship in a democratic society, and, more recently, as an employability skill for an increasingly wide range of jobs. In this regard, the proposed idea tries to facilitate EFL students with sufficient knowledge and application on how to shape and sharpen their analytical and critical thinking skills so as to enable them to analyze and investigate complex questions, to create and finally issue their questions in class, to reflect what they have learned, and to express the constellation of their arguments concerning a topic under discussion. This is in line with the concept of CT proposed by McPeck (1990). He defined CT as ability resembling verbal ability or intelligence. This notion focuses on the analysis that it is theoretically possible to train people for critical thinking within very narrow and practical tasks.

Two recommended ways are proposed to teach critical thinking: 1) infusion of thinking skills activities into subjects in the regular curriculum, and 2) separate programs for teaching critical thinking across curriculum. In turns, this paper will discuss critical

thinking in details, critical thinking pedagogy through the incorporation of argumentation study, and the two recommended ways to teach critical thinking.

II. THE CONCEPT OF CRITICAL THINKING

In his book *How We Think*, John Dewey (1982) defined critical thinking as “reflective thought” that involves suspended judgement, maintenance of a healthy scepticism, and the exercise of an open mind. These three activities entailed the active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief, in light of the ground that supports it. Thus, Dewey’s definition suggests that critical thinking has both an intellectual and an emotional component. Within this definition, students must be taught to examine, prod, question, and reflect on what they have learned. In brief, critical thinking involves students in doing things (probing, questioning, etc.) and thinking about the things they are doing (reflecting, evaluating teacher feedback, etc.). John E. McPeck (1990) mentioned that most of the proponents of critical thinking defined critical thinking within the standard approach of “argument analysis”, and Russel Crescimanno (1991) in his article *The Cultivation of Critical Thinking: Some Tools and Techniques* emphasized that critical thinking in class basically deals with how teachers invite their students into the full depth of the material they teach. Critical thinking in this context should give students some realization that knowledge can be deepened into understanding which can, in time, ripen into wisdom.

Knowledge and Skills Transferred within the Concept of Critical Thinking

It is debatable whether critical thinking should be considered as a general skill or a specific one. This general ability is defined by McPeck (1990: 22) as ability resembling verbal ability or intelligence. This contrast with a specific skill which is acquired after one has been taught how to complete a task. Furthermore, McPeck agreed with several tests done before, including the Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal, that justify the belief that critical thinking is best suited with the former notion, rather than the latter one. That is why there are several ways he introduced in order to sharpen this skill (i.e. such ways as analyzing fallacies, assigning discussion topics that are beneficial to explore

reasoning ability, and the like). Thus, McPeck's analysis focuses on the idea that critical thinking skills are not some kind of an inborn skill. That is why it is theoretically possible to cultivate people's critical thinking skills for some practical tasks.

Brightman (2002) in his article about teaching critical thinking mentioned other ways that are also famous to improve this skill, i.e. making use of general problem solving skills and developing a usable knowledge base. The skills contained within the first approach have been defined in the Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal. This well-known test for critical thinking determines five key specific general problem solving skills constituting critical thinking. Those skills are drawing inferences, recognizing assumptions, drawing conclusions, interpreting data, and evaluating arguments. While, the development of a useable knowledge base is aimed at transferring certain knowledge, so as to train students to be able to learn meaningfully, economize and generalize knowledge, and to find underlying first principles in what they have learned.

Other theories concerning what kind of transferring knowledge within the skill of critical thinking are presented by Joanne Gain Kurfiss (1989). In her article *Critical Thinking by Design*, she also agreed with the result of the best known critical thinking test, which leads to the finding that critical thinking is often thought to be a general ability that students either possess or lack. However, she came up with the idea that much of what critical thinking entails is specific to particular fields, and thus can be learned. In line with this, she advocated the concept that one way to achieve the intellectual demands of critical thinking is to encourage students to investigate complex questions. This way opens a possibility to explore students' ability and willingness to think at once; as it is stated in his advanced proposition that students' ability and willingness to think critically are most likely to develop when knowledge acquisition and thinking about content are intertwined rather than sequential.

Basically, the various theories on critical thinking lead to the same path to which kinds of skills critical thinking will end up. The three theories presented above, of critical thinking theories presented by hundreds of experts, have at least gone together in the way that they all have touched the same basic point about the skills transferred by critical thinking oriented instruction. Such skills as problem solving, evaluating arguments,

reasoning ability, and questioning indeed become the core of skills transferred within the concept of critical thinking.

III. CRITICAL THINKING PEDAGOGY IN EFL INSTRUCTION THROUGH THE INCORPORATION OF ARGUMENTATION STUDY

Thinking is an active mental process to build “extensive knowledge structures” that in the further stage connect the new gained information to somewhat personal and idiosyncratic. Although some teachers or lecturers have recently focused on the role of the learner as an active participant in the teaching-learning process, perhaps many of them do not realize that thinking skills require complex efforts. As expressed by Resnick (1985: 130) that “Knowledge is no longer viewed as a reflection of what has been given from the outside; it is a personal construction in which the individual imposes meaning by relating bits of knowledge and experience to some organizing schemata,” students, therefore, need to be taught and trained how to think. To do so, English lecturers in EFL class can apply critical thinking pedagogy by incorporating the dialectical components in argumentation study. Such components as making inferences; recognizing assumptions, opinions, and arguments; making deduction; making interpretation; evaluating and analyzing arguments are used by students to produce knowledge. Thus, producing knowledge requires the use of a number of thinking skills such as analytical, lateral, problem solving, critical, creative, and reflective thinking (Rose and Nicholl, 1997).

When we discuss about the implementation of critical thinking pedagogy in classrooms, we are not referring simply to pedagogy that challenges our students to think and reason more carefully. Nor are we referring to instruction in the fundamentals of argument per se. Rather, we are referring to a particular system of teaching whose aim is to break down student’s critical thinking into discrete activities, and then to show students how to reflect carefully on each of these activities in order to sharpen their thinking skills. Thus, in transforming the dialectical components of argumentation study as reflected in critical thinking instruction, EFL lecturers need to elaborate, give examples, and provide relevant exercises with which students are stimulated to

demonstrate their critical thinking skills. The incorporation of critical thinking skills can be applied in any subject matters, either skilled subjects or content-based subjects. The following are some of the dialectical components of argumentation study that need to be incorporated in EFL instruction:

- Recognizing Assumptions

Assumptions are ideas that a speaker or a writer takes for granted. Ideas that the arguments of which should be examined and evaluated are assumed to be true. So, it is possible to build an argument that seems completely logical. However, if the initial premise is false, the result will be wrong. Many techniques can be done for revealing assumptions. One of them is to have students read a story and then explain their assumptions and give their rationale for those assumptions. The teacher must be careful not to label responses as right or wrong, otherwise students will be reluctant to speak. To identify the assumptions and construct their rationale for the assumptions, the teacher can ask students to follow the AFAN rule (A = assumption, F = For, A = Against, N = Now what as proposed by Boostrom (1994). Here is a case adapted from Boostrom's example you can practice in your speaking class:

One hot afternoon, a deliveryman drove up to a house, got out of his truck, and started up the walk when he noticed a little girl sitting on the steps. "Is your mother home?" he asked her. The little girl nodded and said, "Yes." So the deliveryman went back to his car, slid out a large box containing a package of books, and carried the heavy box up the steps to the front door. Red-faced and sweating, he pushed the doorbell and waited. No one came to the door. He smiled at the little girl and rang the bell again. Still, no one answered. He waited and rang the bell a third time, and when there was still no sign of anyone in the house, he said to the girl, "I thought you said your mother was home." "She is," the girl replied, "but I don't live here.

After reading the case, ask your students the following questions:

- What made the deliveryman assume that the house belonged to the little girl?
- Would you make the same assumption if you were that deliveryman?
- What would you do to ascertain that the house is the girl's house or that anyone is at home?
- Have you made any wrong assumptions lately? What were they? What was wrong with your assumptions?

Then, guide your students to analyze their assumptions by following the AFAN rule.

- A (Assumptions): What have I assumed? What have I taken for granted? Do I need more information? What are the facts?
- F (For): What is the evidence for my opinion? Is it good evidence? Is it a fact or belief? What are the reasons for my belief?
- A (Against): What are the alternatives to my point of view? Can I see this another way? What if my starting assumption is wrong?
- N (Now what?): This is a question posed to lead to a better assessment of the argument, one that may produce a better final decision.

- Recognizing Different Opinions

Opinions are assertions without the support of sufficient evidences. A difference of opinion arises when two parties do not fully agree on a given standpoint. It is not always the case that the second party takes an opposing standpoint. It is enough that in response to one party's standpoint, the opponent has doubts or is not sure. To illustrate this, we can analyze and compare these two examples of differences of opinions:

A. Rita : I think universities should spend more time teaching writing skills.

Andi: I don't know, I've never really thought about it.

B. Rita: I think universities should spend more time teaching writing skills.

Andi: That's ridiculous! More than enough time is spent on that already.

In the former extract, a difference of opinion made is implicit. Meaning that it needs not be the case that the second party adopts an opposing standpoint. It is enough if the second speaker's response is only in the form of his doubts or uncertainty. On the contrary, the latter example bears an explicit difference of opinions since the standpoint advanced by the first speaker is rejected and put in controversy.

- Distinguishing Standpoints and Expressions of Doubts

Standpoint is different from a merely expression of doubt in the way that the former point denotes a proposition that warrants further supporting arguments and

evidences. That is why standpoint indicates the scope to which the proposition is addressed and the force to what extent the consequence or the effect of the standpoint advanced goes. These examples will be better illustrating this point:

- It is unacceptable to me for you to go into my room without asking for my permission.
- I wonder if going to your room without your permission is really such a good idea.

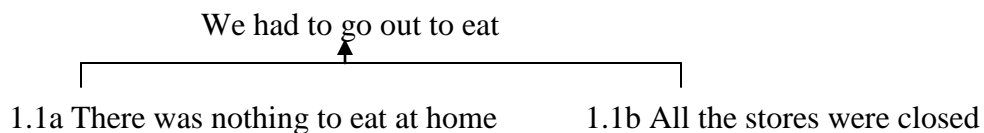
The complication of distinguishing standpoints and expression of doubts is the tendency that expressions of doubts, on the surface, are almost similar to a negative standpoint. The key is that a standpoint leads to the obligation to defend the negative or positive standpoint if it is questioned. Whereas, merely expressing doubts is free from the responsibility of providing “the burden of proof.”

- Recognizing the Structure of Argumentation and the Anatomy of Arguments

The structure of argumentation portrays the complexity of the argumentation, while the anatomy of arguments divides a single piece of argument into some chunks. A single argument based on its structure can consist of one standpoint supported by a single argumentation, multiple argumentation, coordinative argumentation, or subordinative argumentation. Let us consider this example (van Eemeren et.al, 2002:70):

Coordinative Argumentation

1. Standpoint



While, one single argument based on its anatomy comprises one or more reasons or premises used to provide support for a conclusion. The premises are presented in order to persuade people that the conclusion being defended is true or probably true. Consider this example (Halpem, 1996:168):

Premise 1: College graduates earn more money than college dropouts or people who have never attended college.

Premise 2: College graduates report that they are more satisfied with their lives than people who have not graduated from college.

Premise 3: College graduates are healthier and live longer than people who have not graduated from college.

Premise 4: College graduates have jobs that are more interesting and more responsible than people who have not graduated from college.

Conclusion: You should graduate from college

- Recognizing and Identifying Fallacies

Fallacies have been widely known in the study of argumentation since its emergence in Aristotle's systematic study of fallacies has been discovered. Traditionally fallacies are defined as follows:

“A fallacious argument, as almost every account from Aristotle onwards tells you, is one that seems valid but is not so.” (Hamblin, 1970:12)

The emergence of the study of fallacies in the argumentation study departed from the need of coming to critical rationality in the argumentative discourse without neglecting feasible unsound moves that are possibly committed by the interlocutors involved to lead the outcome of the discussion on their won favor. That is why the study of fallacies, that was initiated by the Aristotlian heritage, is aimed at describing and classifying forms of argumentation that are regarded as incorrect or unsound, and to explicate why they are recognized so. From the early emergence to the most current innovations in the argumentation study, fallacies have been continuously developed. The newest invented approach is the Dutch Pragma-Dialectical approach, which views fallacies as a violation of some rules for a critical discussion, and therefore prevents the resolution of a difference of opinions (van Eemeren et.al., 1996:74).

What follows are some examples of the informal fallacies whose most of them and their names (translated in most cases from Greek to Latin) originated in Aristotle's manual on fallacies, *De Sophisticis Elenchis* (On Sophistical Refutations).

1. Ad Hominem

- a) Abusive Ad Hominem: a direct attack on a person's character rather than a direct focus on his/her arguments.

Example: There is no way that our governor candidate can provide equal welfare to all his people. Look at him, he keeps on building houses for his children.

- b) Circumstantial Ad Hominem: opposing speaker is accused of having vested interests.

Example: Of course he is against raising cigarette taxes; he smokes eight packs a day.

- c) Tu Quoque: indicating that the opposing side made the same error; often times referred to as "you did it too!"

Example: Yeah, I cheated on my exam, but you did it too when you were a kid.

2. Ad Baculum (Appeal to Force)

Someone in position of authority supports their claim by threatening the audience with undesirable consequences, which may be either ideological or brute force, if the audience does not accept the claim.

Example: My dad is involved in this team too and he is very powerful. If you want your teaching job, you will give me an "A" in this class.

3. Ad Populum (Appeal to the People)

This fallacy is "an argument in which an appeal is made to emotions, especially to powerful feelings that can sway people in large crowds" (Engel, 1982:173). This fallacy

commonly uses emotional language, and expressions that are irrelevant to the argument at hand.

Example: Show your American pride and eat beef.

IV. THE TWO RECOMMENDED WAYS TO TEACH CRITICAL THINKING

Two ways are recommended to apply critical thinking instruction. The first way is to infuse critical thinking instruction into the subject matters, and the second one is to implement in a separate curriculum. The first option requires teachers or lecturers' creativity how to design, select, and incorporate the dialectical stages of argumentation study for promoting critical thinking instruction. The second option deals with how to set CT instruction into a higher education curriculum. This alternative demands the availability of instructors who have had a training or a study on argumentation study. Moreover, the teaching of CT instruction in a special program will affect the internal study load of higher education. This situation obviously needs a policy review and assessment on how the mechanism of the teaching of CT will be best applied. In the other words, the success of the program depends on a large number of implementation-specific factors, such as the quality of teaching and the adequacy of teaching staff, administrative support, the syllabus design, the design of the teaching method, the supply and availability of relevant sources or references, and the like.

Of the two options offered, the most feasible way to apply at this moment is the first one. We do not have to wait the policy makers to consider the second option. As English lecturers we have had our autonomy to manage the teaching-learning process in our classrooms. Taking our own initiative to adapt the dialectical stages of argumentation study for integrating CT materials into EFL instruction is indeed a creative and challenging breakthrough. It needs, therefore, a nerve to give CT instruction a try to provide opportunities to students to engage in communicative and critical teaching-learning atmosphere.

V. CONCLUSION

Having skills in questioning, analyzing, comparing, contrasting, and evaluating is very important to face the today's challenges; the challenges of the globalization era. By developing critical literacy, we train students not to blatantly believe in any information coming to them, and not to get addicted to being told what to think and do. They will be able to stand in a certain position confidently since they have gone through the reflection and evaluation processes; the processes of sensing and evaluating their standpoint and arguments. In short, providing students instruction in thinking skills is important for several reasons:

- These skills are essential to have in our rapidly changing and technologically oriented world.
- Instruction in CT can promote students' intellectual growth as they practice to apply the dialectical stages of argumentation study.
- CT instruction will be of benefit to students to take a stand in response to our rapidly changing national situations in every aspect of life, politics, social, and economics.

To make CT instruction come true, EFL teachers or lecturers can take varied instructional approaches to promote CT materials into EFL instruction. The design and the implementation of CT instruction require teachers or lecturers' wide knowledge and open-minded attitude in their preparation and application processes. In its implementation, neither infused thinking skills instruction nor separate curricula is inherently superior to the other; both can lead to improve student performance. Only that the latter option needs the government support in the sense that CT instruction has been defined into clear mechanism before it is applied as an integrated part of university curriculum. Thus, the technical factors supporting the success of thinking skills instruction must have been well-identified and prepared.

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