

ENHANCING CRITICAL THINKING THROUGH QUESTIONING IN WRITING EXPOSITION TEXT

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ABSTRACT

This study intended to examine 1) the correlation between duration of study of the students and their critical thinking ability in writing, 2) the obstacles faced by the students in developing critical thinking in writing an exposition text, and 3) the implementation process of questioning to enhance critical thinking in writing an exposition text. The subject of this study was all students of semester I, semester III, and semester V (10 students) in a private foreign language academy. The duration of the study was 3 months consisted of 12 one-hour Writing lectures. There were 3 spirals of self-reflective cycles implemented and each cycle consisted of four meetings. Each meeting in a row was pre-test, treatment, post-test, and reflection. The data collected were qualitative (through observation and interview) data analyzed by using Constant Comparative Analysis method and quantitative data from the mean scores of pre-test and post-test. When the lecturer-as-researcher gave the treatment, the students were taught to ask questions to determine arguments for their exposition texts. Therefore, the results revealed that the critical thinking of the students in writing an exposition text was enhanced by implementing questioning.

Keywords: questioning, critical thinking, writing, exposition text

ABSTRAK

Penelitian tindakan ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui 1) apakah ada hubungan antara lama durasi belajar mahasiswa dengan pemikiran kritis mereka dalam menulis, 2) hambatan apa saja yang dihadapi mahasiswa dalam mengembangkan pemikiran kritis mereka dalam menulis teks eksposisi, dan 3) proses penerapan bertanya untuk meningkatkan pemikiran kritis dalam menulis teks eksposisi. Subyek penelitian merupakan semua mahasiswa dari semester I, semester III, dan semester V (10 mahasiswa) di akademi swasta bahasa asing. Durasi penelitian ini adalah 3 bulan terdiri dari 12 kali satu jam matakuliah *Writing*. Terdapat 3 siklus spiral refleksi diri

yang diterapkan dan empat pertemuan pada setiap siklus. Setiap pertemuan berturut-turut adalah *pre-test*, perlakuan, *post-test*, dan refleksi. Data yang dikumpulkan adalah data kualitatif (melalui pengamatan dan wawancara) yang dianalisis menggunakan metode analisa perbandingan terus menerus dan data kuantitatif berasal dari rata-rata nilai *pre-test* dan *post-test*. Saat dosen sebagai peneliti memberikan perlakuan, para mahasiswa diajari cara menanyakan pertanyaan sebelum menyatakan pendapat untuk teks eksposisi mereka. Sehingga, hasilnya diketahui bahwa pemikiran kritis mahasiswa dalam menulis teks eksposisi dapat meningkat dengan penerapan bertanya.

Kata kunci : bertanya, pemikiran kritis, menulis, teks eksposisi

INTRODUCTION

As a human's natural process, thinking is often biased, distorted, partial, uninformed, prejudiced (Paul & Elder, 2009, p. 2). Therefore, to think critically is a necessary skill that can help human deal with mental or spiritual questions and it can be used to evaluate people, policies, institutions, and social problems (Hatcher & Spencer, 2005).

However, the pre-research activities (pre-test, questionnaire, and interview) conducted on the Diploma students in one of the foreign language academies in Surakarta show the result that the students failed in writing an exposition text because they lack the skill of critical thinking. The students should be given guidance during the teaching process, integrate critical thinking in the classroom, and develop the students' ideas by enhancing their critical thinking in writing an exposition text through questioning.

Critical Thinking in Writing

Critical thinking can be defined as a learning ability that should be taught to all students during the teaching process in order that the students can take charge of their thinking in analyzing the information systematically to solve certain problems and be able to decide rationally what to do or what not to believe. (Yenice, 2011; Paul & Elder, 2009; Alexander et al., 2010; Duron et al., 2006).

By using critical thinking, students are allowed to comment subjects, incidents, conceptions, and events from the different point of view (Yenice, 2011). At the same time, students should be able to analyze information to solve the problems (Alexander et al., 2010).

Elements of Thought

Since students interact with the text they write using their previous knowledge, critical thinking in writing becomes the central of active learning by asking questions, collecting, and assessing information to come out with logical and organized writing product (AlKhouday, 2015, p. 213).

Therefore, critical thinker students should be able to answer a list of questions in order to give them direction and help them focus their thoughts (Paul & Elder, 2009, p. 2–6) described in the table below:

Table 1 Paul and Elder Questions Using the Elements of Thought (2009)

Standards	Questions	Functions
Questions of Purpose	What am I trying to accomplish? What is my central aim? My purpose?	To define tasks
Questions of Question	What question am I raising? What question am I addressing?	To focus on the problems
Questions of Information	What information am I using in coming to that conclusion? What information do I need to settle the question?	To look at the sources of information
Questions of Inferences/ conclusion	How did I reach this conclusion? Is there another way to interpret the information?	To consider alternative ways
Questions of Concepts	What is the main idea here? Can I explain this idea?	To look at the theories
Questions of Assumptions	What am I taking for granted? What assumption has led me to that conclusion?	To examine what students are taking for granted
Questions of Implications/ consequences	If someone accepted my position, what would be the implications? What am I implying?	To follow where our thinking is leading
Questions of Point of View	From what point of view am I looking at this issue? Is there another point of view I should consider?	To examine point of view and to consider other relevant points of view

Universal Intellectual Standards

To ensure the quality of thinking, there is a list of several questions can be used. It is called universal intellectual standards that should be taught explicitly to let the students learn thinking. Students will be able to think more critically by answering the list of questions provided.

Those are to apply critical thinking, to become infused in the thinking of students, to form part of their inner voice, and to guide them reason better (Paul & Elder, 2009, p. 8–10). Those can be drawn in the following table:

Table 2 Paul and Elder Universal Intellectual Standards (2009)

Standards	Functions: to determine that a statement
Clarity	Can be clearly understood
Accuracy	Is clear but not exact
Precision	Is not stated explicitly or in detail
Relevance	Is not relevant to the issue
Depth	Is superficial
Breadth	Shows only one point of view
Logic	Does not make sense
Significance	Is not considered in the problem
Fairness	Reflects a partiality, preference, or prejudice

ACTION RESEARCH

Action research is part of a broad movement that has been going on in education generally related to the ideas of reflective practice because the teacher is as the researcher (Burns, 2010, p. 2). Action research involves learning in and through action and reflection conducted in a variety of contexts (McNiff, 2002, p. 15). One of the main aims of action research is to identify a problematic situation or issue that the participants consider worth looking into more deeply and systematically (Burns, 2010, p. 2).

Action researchers are often engaged in a series of steps such as 1) issue identification, 2) data collection, 3) action planning, 4) plan activation, and 5) outcome assessment, however, the approach does not need to proceed in a straight line (Pelton, 2010, p. 8). In this research, the researcher's role is a lecturer and an active participant observation at the same time. The researcher implements the action research model that can be described in the spiral of self-reflection in terms of a spiral of self-reflective cycles of 1) planning a change, 2) acting and observing the process and consequences of the change, 3) reflecting on these processes and consequences, and then 4) re-planning, and so on (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014, p, 18).

THE STUDY

Research Questions

1. What is the correlation between the students' duration of study and their critical thinking ability in writing exposition text?
2. What are the obstacles faced by the students in writing an exposition text?

3. How to overcome the obstacles faced by the students in writing an exposition text through questioning?

Participants of the Study

The subject of this research was all of the students (semester I, semester III, and semester V) in a private foreign language academy. There were 10 students consisted of 5 male students and 5 female students at the age of 18 to 37 years old. All of them were workers and having another duty outside the classroom, therefore, they tend to neglect the lectures.

Schedule of Study: the Action Research Cycles

Table 3 Schedule of Lessons and Data Collection

	Lesson	Topic	Writing Tasks	Interview
CYCLE 1 (4 hours)	Lesson 1	Introduction to Critical Thinking	Writing Task 1	Interview 1
	Lesson 2	Introduction to Exposition Text		
	Lesson 3	Pretest: "Full Day School is a Fool"		
	Lesson 4	Giving Questionnaire		
Reflection				
CYCLE 2 (4 hours)	Lesson 5	Discussing the Pretest Result	Writing Task 2	Interview 2
	Lesson 6	Posttest: "Night Class in ABA"	Writing Task 3	
	Lesson 7	Introduction to Questioning		
	Lesson 8	Posttest: Random Article		
Reflection				
CYCLE 3 (4 hours)	Lesson 9	Discussing Critical Thinking	Writing Task 4	Interview 3
	Lesson 10	Discussing Questioning		
	Lesson 11			
	Lesson 12	Posttest: "Full Day School is a Fool"		
Overall Analysis				

Data Collection and Analysis

In this study, the qualitative and quantitative methods were used in collecting the data. Qualitative methods included observation and interview. Quantitative methods included written test that covered pre-test and posttest. The qualitative data were analyzed by using Constant Comparative Method (CCM) from Glasser and Strauss in Moleong (2010, p. 287) that consisted of four stages such as data reduction, categorization, synthesis, and hypothesis.

Meanwhile, the quantitative data were in the form of writing exposition text scores from pre-test and post-test that both of the mean scores are compared to find the improvement of the students' achievement. The formula to find the students' scores is as follow:

$$\frac{\text{Acquired score}}{\text{Maximum score}} \times 100$$

The formula to get the mean score is drawn below:

$$M = \frac{\sum X}{n}$$

Note that:

M = mean (average)

$\sum X$ = the total score

n = the number of students

When the mean score is increased, it can be considered that the students' skill in writing an exposition text is enhanced by integrating critical thinking in the classroom. The scores will be counted based on the conceptualization by Paul and Elder (2009, p. 8). However, to meet the need of the critical thinking scores in writing, the researcher modified it based on the indicators of critical thinking competence in writing exposition text.

THE CYCLES OF THE STUDY

Cycle 1

In this cycle, the students were first given a questionnaire to measure their level of critical thinking. They were introduced about this study in order that the students could understand what to do in the classroom.

After giving a questionnaire, the students did a pretest of writing an exposition text with a topic entitled, "Full Day School is a Fool". Students were allowed to open dictionary and to look for other sources in the internet to search supporting arguments. Unfortunately 2 of them did plagiarism. Therefore, the researcher asked them both to rewrite their arguments and warned them not to do the same mistake.

Based on questionnaires analysis from Critical Thinking Mindset Self-Rating Form by Facione (2014, p. 14), the students were divided into 3 proficiency levels. It was found that the disposition toward critical thinking of 4 students were generally positive, 5 students were ambivalent or mixed overall, and 1 student was averse or hostile.

Cycle 2

In accordance with what was discovered in Cycle 1, some actions were planned in this cycle such as 1) teaching critical thinking to students, 2) discussing about exposition text, and 3) implementing questioning before writing exposition text.

One of the problems was a lack of understanding the structures of exposition text. The students got difficulties to find evidence to write arguments and were unable to put their ideas along with valid references or theories. Some of students also admitted that this was their first experience writing exposition text. Therefore, the researcher decided to teach exposition text first before teaching critical thinking. Another problem was the students still got difficulties to choose appropriate words and there were many grammar mistakes found in their writings. The researcher then taught the students about grammar thing and vocabularies that might usually be used in writing exposition text.

After all explanations, the students were asked to write exposition text with the same topic, "Full Day School is a Fool". Meanwhile, the students felt bored with the topic, they prefer to write another topic. Then, the researcher found a hot issue they recently faced. It was about "Night Class in ABA (Foreign Language Academy)". They were excited because the topic was very controversial among them. They started to look for references on the internet to support their arguments.

In this cycle, the students were also asked to write exposition text again to practice their writing before the posttest in cycle 3. The topic of the second writing was different. It was taken from various articles that the students should read before writing their responses toward the article.

Cycle 3

In relation with the end of Cycle 2, it was revealed that the students were a little bit able to write exposition text but some of them still got difficult to arrange words correctly. They admitted that they were confused how to express it in English. The students had a lot of ideas in mind but they got stuck when they were asked to write it down on the paper.

Therefore, in this cycle, the researcher taught the students about questioning. For instance, the topic of the last posttest was "Full Day School is a Fool". The students then should ask questions and answer their own questions in their writings.

Example of the questions has been written in the following table:

Table 4

Questions for the Topic of "Full Day School is a Fool" Using the Elements of Thought

No	Standard	Questions
1	Questions of Purpose	What do I think is the purpose of exposition text? What is the purpose of Full Day School?

		What do I base my opinion on?
2	Questions of Question	What is this text about? How is Full Day School trying to affect students or parents?
3	Questions of Concepts or Information	This text is an exposition text. What is that? Do I know the generic structure and language feature of it? What is Full Day School?
4	Questions of Assumptions	What assumptions can I make the arguments? What assumptions do I want to write this text of Full Day School?
5	Questions of Implications/ consequences	What do I think is the consequence of writing this exposition text? The consequence of Full Day School? What am I hoping to achieve from this text? What will happen after I write this?
6	Questions of Point of View	To whom is this text of Full Day School for? From what point of view I write arguments for this text?
7	Questions of Inferences/ conclusion	What inference can I make from my arguments?

CONCLUSION

The Duration of Study and Critical Thinking in Writing Exposition

Based on the interview, 1 out of 4 students in semester 1 had joined an English course for a year before signing in this foreign language academy, 1 out of 2 students in semester 3 was a former English literature student in a private institution in Yogyakarta, and 2 of 4 students in semester 5 were English teachers. In addition, only 3 of them had experience once or twice in writing exposition text and there were no students had ever written a text critically because they never heard about critical thinking.

Therefore, there was no correlation between the students' duration of study and their critical thinking ability in writing exposition text because the students of semester 1, semester 3, and semester 5 had different background of study.

Obstacles Faced by the Students in Writing Exposition Text

There were many obstacles faced by the students when they tried to write not only exposition text but also other text. The most crucial problem for the students is grammar mistakes. Only 2 out of 10 students were consistently good at grammar, 6 students were moderate and 2 students were lack of grammar proficiency. Based on the interview with the students, the researcher found that they still got confused about the language feature in exposition text.

Writing Exposition through Questioning

After implementing questioning to write exposition, it was revealed that the scores of the students were significantly increased.

No	Name	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4	Task 5
1	TM	41,7	50	54,2	75	75
2	EE	41,7	50	58,3	66,7	75
3	JM	45,8	50	58,3	70,8	75
4	WE	37,5	41,7	45,8	50	58,3
5	MW	37,5	50	50	54,2	75
6	JS	37,5	50	54,2	75	75
7	MF	33,3	50	50	50	75
8	DK	33,3	45,8	50	50	62,5
9	US	25	33,3	37,5	50	50
10	BS	37,5	45,8	50	54,2	66,7
Mean		37,1	46,7	50,8	59,6	68,8

The students admitted that exposition text became easier to write through questioning. They finally could have purpose when writing and be more focus on the purpose of the text.

CONCLUSION

Teaching writing exposition using questioning to enhance critical thinking might be time consuming since the teacher would definitely get pauses and waiting time to have expected responses from the students.

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