STUDENTS' CRITICAL THINGKING SKILLS AS REFLECTED ON THEIR IELTS READING TEST: CASE STUDY AT UNIVERSITY OF MUSLIM NUSANTARA AL-WASLIYAH

Reni Sapitri
Teguh Satria Amin

Universitas Muslim Nusantara Al-wasliyah

renisafitriharahap@gmail.com
satria_man23@yahoo.com

Abstract

Critical reading has close links to EFL students' competence in reading comprehension. Reading is one of the skills which encourage the readers to think critically in understanding the texts comprehensively without concerning on the written text itself. In the level of university specifically English education major, the aims of language learning is a mean of communication. It encourages the students to be able to understand the language concept in form of writing of various topics, explain the relationship and apply it by transforming the information or ideas with their own language. Thus, this research describes the critical thinking of the students as reflected on the IELTS reading test on the reading class. The respondents consisted of 25 students of English department from semester VII in 2017/2018 academic year in UMN Al-wasliyah. The research was conducted in qualitative in which the data were collected through reading test, observation, and interview. The findings recognize that critical reading skills are utmost importance for EFL students. However, many of them unable to apply relevant critical thinking skills in analyzing what they were reading.

Keywords: Critical Thinking, Critical Reading, IELTS.

A. INTRODUCTION

Reading is an important skill in EFL teaching. In reading processes, the readers are encouraged to connect aggressively with everyday tasks that necessitate their constructing judgments of their responses. Therefore, the readers should think critically about the reading of the text-book or reference they read. As reading is one of the act in language learning, it is like is behavioral that can be developed and it can be learned through constant practice. Rivers (2001) and Wolters, Pintrich etal. (2005) stated that critical readers have been identified as having the ability to switch with ease to the most appropriate reading skills, even particularly difficult ones, as demanded by the situation. Meanwhile, Anderson (2003) argued that reading is an

active, fluent process which involves the reader and the reading material in building meaning. From the foregoing, it can be concluded that, during the reading process, information from visual, semantic, conceptual and linguistic sources combines to make sense of sentence and phrases.

As developing critical thinking skills in undergraduate students is one of the primary goals in higher education after the graduated, they are expected to become good citizens in evaluating the validity of information, better personal and business or making good leadership decisions, scholars and educators (Braun, 2004; Halpern, 1998; Kegan, 1994; Kalyczynski, 2001). Halpern (1998) stated that it is crucial to develop the critical thinking skills of the students in order to help them know how to learn and how to think clearly. It is in line with make purposeful judgments about what to believe or what to do as (Facione, Sanchez, Facione, & Gainen, 1995) proposed. It is believed that by having good critical thinking ability, the students can be prepared well to compete and exercise their rights and responsibilities of citizenship in a global community.

There are several views of critical thinking from experts. Paul (2001) stated that the focus of critical thinking is based on observation and information while Beyer (1999) defines the critical thinking is the ability and tendency to obtain, evaluate, and utilize information in an effective way. Therefore, it is crucial in critical thinking to reorganize, evaluate, and use the already existing knowledge or recently encountered information effectively. As can be noticed from the definitions, the concept of critical thinking is tried to be explained upon philosophical and psychological bases. While the philosophical approach focuses on the norms of good thinking, the concept of human cognition, and the cognitive skills required for a realistic world view perceiving events and situations objectively, the psychological approach emphasizes experimental studies on thoughts and thinking, individual differences in comprehending complex ideas, and problem solving which is an aspect of critical thinking (Karaduz, 2010).

Meanwhile, the problems in developing students' critical thinking are complex. 1) Students' learning habit. They have prior learning habits and experiences which are mostly reproduction-oriented. However, in the classroom process they were rarely given the chances to question, explain, or evaluate the "knowledge" instructed; 2) the lack of guidance or assistance regarding critical thinking instruction. Teaching

236

faculty in the primary and secondary education received little guidance or assistance regarding critical thinking instruction. Furthermore, their teaching load and time constraint deprive them of the chance to embed critical thinking into curricula that introduced (Chen, 1989; Chiodo & Tsai, 1995, 1997). Therefore, how to reverse these students' learning habits and sets of minds by helping them develop critical thinking skills and nurture disposition toward critical thinking is of great importance. As majority of the English department students at UMN Al-wasliyah Unversity were less expressive, less confident and less mature in seeking truth and immature in critical thinking. Therefore, this study aims to describe the critical thinking to a literature introduction course to locate a possible solution to this problem.

This research, therefore, presents the description of critical thinking of the English department students at UMN Al-wasliyah University in order to locate a possible solution to this problem.

B. RESEARCH METHODS

The research conducted in March – June 2018 focused on the analysis of students' critical thinking skills in reading especially on IELTS reading passages. The population was the English Department students of semester VII at UMN Al-wasliyah University who were taking Reading subject. The samples were selected by using cluster-random sampling. The data were students' scores of reading test formally administrated.

The method of the research were in qualitative and data collection techniques were used in the study since the aim was not to demonstrate the superiority of the students in the class rather it aimed to discover the critical thinking skills of the students while reading. Qualitative researchers "are likely to observe how people interact with each other; how certain kinds of questions are answered; the meanings that people give to certain words and actions; how people's attitudes are translated into actions; how students seem to be affected by a teachers manner gestures, or comments and the like (Fraenkel & N.E. Wallen.2000).

Therefore, the obtained data were analyzed based on Foundation for Critical Thinking in order to find out the students' attitude which might be match with any of the critical thinking skills suggested. Thus, in analyzing the data obtained, the content analysis method was administered through observation, reading tests and interview.

237

The data were collected through the implementation of various critical reading lesson plans based on the idea that critical thinking skills can be improved in the reading classes where problem solving, deductive reasoning or showing evidence supporting conclusions activities are conducted. During the implications of the lesson plans, using different data collection tools such as observation, interviews, reading tests. We analyzed the students' critical thinking skills such as exercising fair-mindedness, exploring thoughts underlying feelings and feelings underlying thoughts, developing confidence in reason, clarifying issues, conclusions, or beliefs, analyzing or evaluating arguments, clarifying and questioning beliefs, theories or perspectives, noting significant similarities and differences, examining and evaluating assumptions, distinguishing relevant from irrelevant facts and etc.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The measurement of skills was used to assess the students' understanding of the critical reading and thinking skills. Throughout eight weeks, the students were provided with critical reading activities through the similar reading materials adopted from IELTS reading compilation. During this period the result of their reading test were analyzed and they were observed then interview based on CT dispositions such as *truth seeking, open-mindedness, systematicity, inquisitiveness, self-confidence and maturity.*

Table.1:
Reading Test Score

Correct Answer	Range score/ Band	Category	Frequency (Participants)	Percentage
39-40	9-10	Expert user		
35-38	8-8.5	Very good user		
30-34	7-7.5	Good user		
23-29	6-6.5	Competent user		
15-22	5-5.5	Modest user	1	4%
10-14	4-4.5	Limited user	12	48%
7-9	3-3.5	Extremely limited user	11	44%
2-5	2-2.5	Intermittent user	1	4%
0-1	0-1	Non-user		
	Total		25	100%

Based on the data in table above, it can be seen that the majority of the students achieved low band scores in reading comprehension. There were no students achieved above band 5. Furthermore, only one student among 25 (4%) got band 5 and more students who got band score below 4.5 and still there was one student achieved below band 3.In addition, based on the researcher's observation or notes, it was found that many students had low ability in understanding academic English text. It means that the students were less expressive, less confident and less mature in seeking truth and immature in critical thinking.

The data from the interview reflected the students' critical thinking while they were reading IELTS test. The questions in the interview were based on the the CT skills suggested by Foundation for Critical Thinking (Facione, P.A.2000). Therefore, the critical thinking skills of the students are analyzed based on these indicators.

Thinking Independently. In this phase, the readers were not merely accepting the writer's ideas fully. It can be seen that the students did not accept directly what the writer of the text argued about. From the interviews and reading test results revealed that the majority of the students were tending to make an association between all known relevant knowledge and their thought and behavior. They articulated that they became aware of that their own ideas on what they were reading.

Student 17 : "When I read the passage I try to connect it with my previous information that I know so I can understand what the passage is trying to explain".

Developing Intellectual Courage. In this phase, the result of the test used to assess their reading comprehension. The interview results reflected that the more knowledgeable they became the more they think critically dealing with beliefs or ideas. However, in the interview, many of them argued that they felt nervous or lack of self-confident when they faced the real test.

Student 20 : "When I read the long passage I felt dizzy and nervous to find the main ideas. As in IELTS reading test which has one hour time allocation, it encourages me to comprehend the text effectively."

Clarifying and Analyzing the Meaning of Words or Phrases. Through this phase**,** the readers are assigned to work in groups to compare and contrast arguments in the texts. Based

239

on the observation, the majority of the students were observed to be looking into clear, obvious examples of the terms and concepts. In addition, during interview, they mostly mention that when they had difficulty with terms and directly consult into dictionary but useless.

> Student 18 : "I often refer to dictionary when I had difficulty in understanding the words and it was often useless. So, now I am using the context and trying to exemplify the terms and making it clear"

Evaluating the Credibility of the Sources of Information. In this phase, the students were observed to be questioning the evidence by looking for unbiased, reliable and accurate information. As readers the ideas in finding using necessary information are important, therefore, the skill to decide the source of information needs to improve.

From the in interview sessions, they mostly stated that they know that the reliability of the sources of information is achieved in line with the skills in finding the information.

> Student 10 : "When I was reading the passages, I realized that there were a lot of sources. So, to improve the reliability of the information, I always try to find the sources at the end of the passage."

Listening Critically. This phase is the art of silent dialogue in which the critical thinking is practiced when they were studying note taking while listening the lecturer reading the passages. In this phase the students were observed with low reading capacity and asked questions to orient themselves to the lecturer. It can be reflected from their questions when they utter like the following statement.

> Student 15 : "Could you please translate it to make it clear or what it means and the examples. I was afraid of asking questions and many times I did not know what I want to ask"

Noting Significant Similarities and Differences. In this phase, the readers should distinguish relevant from irrelevant facts in the passage. When the students worked in groups on reading skills, including identifying the writer's argumentation(s) and responding to the evidence provided, they were observed to be aware of what was more important and what was less important and similarities and differences between the texts they studied. However, in the real test, it was not applied. From the interview, it can be seen that the students do

realize and aware of how deeply they wanted to comprehend the texts but they argued that the difficulty of the test and time allotment of the test made them lost.

> Students 6 : "Actually, I found it difficult to distinguish facts and opinions and what is relevant and irrelevant in what I was reading. Often, the topic is unfamiliar to me and I do not know the vocabularies. It makes me dizzy and nervous to continue to answer the questions in one hour only."

D. CONCLUSION

The topic of passages in the IELTS reading tests required the readers to think critically. Thus, based on the result of the reading test, students were still unaware of what critical thinking skills they were using. The students' responses reflected in the interview that they were not able to apply relevant critical thinking skills to analyze what they were reading.

Based on the interviews, majority of the students argued that they were not considering of critical thinking skills and aware of finding ideas from what they read. They also articulated that they were previously simply reading, accepting the ideas without caring for the arguments and answering the questions provided without looking into the arguments from different perspective and analyzing the evidence. They argued that one hour duration for forty questions with long passages made them nervous.

Therefore, critical thinking requires hard work. Many students would prefer just answer to the complex questions without thinking it critically. Thus, as lecturer/ teacher we should persistently and patiently teach them the strategy to think critically which can apply in reading through in order they can process the acquired information. It is essential as for reading lecturer/teachers to recognize and believe that the role of thinking skills in education and integrate them into the courses. In order to introduce, them no matter what course we are teaching, it is substantially important to implement appropriate teaching strategies to foster critical reading skills. For further research, conducting a research to investigate the factors which might affect the students' reading comprehension and critical reading and thinking skills in a foreign language reading context, compared with L1 reading contexts will be valuable.

241

REFERENCES

Anderson, N. J. (2003). *Metacognitive Reading Strategies Increase L2 Performance*. The Language Teacher Online 27(7): 1-3.

Chen, L. H. "The Soul-searching of Critical Thinking Teaching in Elementary School Social Studies," Contempora Education, Vol. 15 (1989), pp. 121-135

Chiodo, J. J. & Tsai, M. H. "Taiwanese Students in American Universities: Are They Ready for Critical Thinking?" College Student Journal, Vol. 29, No. 3 (1995), pp. 374-382

Facione, P. A., Sanchez, (Giancarlo) C. A., Facione, N. C., & Gainen, J.(1995).The Disposition toward Critical Thinking. *Journal of General Education*, Vol. 44, No. 1.

Facione, P.A.(2000). *The disposition toward critical thinking: Its character, measurement and relation to critical thinking skill. Informal Logic*, 20(1): 61-84

Fraenkel, J.R. & N.E. Wallen.(2000). *How to design and evaluate research in education* (6th Ed.). U.S.A.: McGraw-Hill

Halpern, D. (1998).*Teaching Critical Thinking for Transfer across Domains: Dispositions, Skills, Structure Training, and Metacognitive Monitoring*. American Psychologist, Vol. 53.

Braun, N. M.(2004).Critical Thinking in the Business Curriculum. *Journal of Education for Business*, Vol. 79

Karaduz, A. (2010). Language Skills and Critical Thinking.Turkish Studies. Volume 5/3. 1567- 1593.

Kegan, R.(1994). *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge.

Klaczynski, P. A. (2001).Framing Effects on Adolescent Task Representations, Analytic and Heuristic Processing, and Decision Making: Implications for the Normative/descriptive Gap. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*,Vol. 22.

Paul, R. and L. Elder.(2001). *Critical Thinking: Tools for taking charge of your learning and your life.* Upper Saddle River: NJ: Prentice Hall.

Rivers, W. P. (2001). Autonomy at All Costs: An Ethnography of Metacognitive Self Assessment and Self Management among Experienced Language Learners. *The Modern Language Journal* 85(2): 279-290.

Strategy List: 35 Dimensions of Critical Thought. The Critical Thinking Community: Foundation for Critical Thinking *Retrieved April 10, 2006 from http://www.criticalthinking.org/resources/ k12/TRK12-strategy-list.cfm.*

Wolters, C. A., P. R. Pintrich, & Karabenick, S. A. (2005). *Assessing Academic aSelf-Regulated Learning*. Paper Presented at the Conference on Indicators of Positive Development: What Do Children Need to Flourish?: 251-270. Sponsored by Child Trends, National Institutes of Health, USA.