

Chapter One

Introduction

This introduction highlights the description of the study. In this chapter, the researcher presents the background of the study, identification and limitation of the problem, research questions. The researcher also explains the purposes of the study and the significances of the study.

Background of the Study

In the 21st century, college students are expected to be independent learners. Students are encouraged to be active in a class, engaged in a class discussion or debate, to express their arguments, to write good analytical essays, and to get involved in other class activities which require a high order of thinking. The ability to think critically and to argue reasonably and rationally has been regarded as an essential aspect of education. As stated by Case (2005), critical thinking has been recognized as an important educational goal.

Critical thinking has been defined in many different ways. In brief, critical thinking is individuals' ability to think clearly as well as rationally and to make correct decisions independently. Critical thinking is a process of making decisions based on evidence rather than guessing in a scientific problem-solving process (Nugent & Vitale, 2008). Moreover, Paul and Elder (2005) argued that critical thinking is a process where students improve the quality of their thinking skills. Hence, the knowledge that students received will be processed stage by stage in

accordance with their level of intelligent and issues which they will encounter in real life to solve their problem.

Having good critical thinking skills gives many benefits, especially for college students. The skills will enable students to improve their attention and observation, reading concentration, ability to identify main ideas of a text instead of becoming distracted by less important materials, ability to respond to the points in a message (Cottrell, 2011). Besides, Ardington (2010) argued that students who have good critical thinking will easily reach their own learning goals, achieve better marks, and become less dependent on teachers and textbooks. A study of Mahyuddin, Lope-Pihie, Elias, and Konting (2004) showed that language learners with critical thinking ability are capable of thinking critically and creatively in order to achieve the goals of the curriculum, making decisions, solving problems, using their thinking skills, and understanding language or its contents. Moreover, it is found that students with low thinking skills got difficulty in completing tasks that require them to think independently outside of rote memorization and recall (Zachary, 2011).

One of the ongoing debates in education research is whether students can learn to think critically through their own exploration or they need to be formally taught the skill as part of the curriculum. Snyder and Snyder (2008) mentioned that students are not born with the ability to think critically. However, it is possible for students to learn critical thinking skills. Cubukcu (2006) stated that thinking is a disposition, can be taught, and should be taught. In addition, Black (2005) found that students are able to improve their thinking skills if they are

taught how to think. Nickerson (1994) also noted that students need to be taught how to think more effectively, critically, coherently and creatively. Students who have not been taught how to think critically will be unable to make rational decisions in their adult life because they fail to examine the consequences, assumptions, and prejudices of issues around them (Paul, 1990). Therefore, teachers play an important role in developing students' critical thinking.

It is not easy for teachers to develop students' critical thinking skills. There are so many challenges in enhancing students' critical thinking. In most educational systems, according to Paul (1990), students gain lower order learning which is associative and rote memorization resulting in misunderstanding, prejudice, and discouragement in which students develop techniques for short term memorization and performance. These techniques block the students' thinking about what they learn. Paul (1990) revealed that most students are accustomed to sitting back in class passively and listening to a lecture. Choy and Chey (2009) stated that teaching critical thinking is challenging because teachers have difficulty in engaging aspects of critical thinking in their lesson. Williams (2005) wrote "critical thinking requires hard work; many students would prefer that teachers just give them answer to complex questions" (p. 182).

Based on the researcher's observation at English Education Department of Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta (EED of UMY), some teachers gave the students many activities or assignments in order to develop students' critical thinking skills. However, the researcher noticed that there were some difficulties or challenges when the teachers tried to develop students' critical thinking. For

example, in a reflective writing activity, some students got difficulty in accomplishing this activity. It can be seen when the teachers gave an assignment. There were students who could finish their task and there were students who could not finish their task. Therefore, there might be difficulties or challenges when the teachers tried to develop students' critical thinking. In this study, the researcher attempted to find out the strategies and challenges in developing students' critical thinking at the EED of UMY in depth.

Identification and Limitation of the Problem

Critical thinking is an essential skill. In order to be considered as a critical thinker, there are several characteristics such as individuals' ability to think rationally and make correct decisions independently. In addition, critical thinking has many advantages. Students who have developed critical thinking skills are capable of doing some activities of which other students may not be capable. However, there are challenges of developing critical thinking. The challenges can be from both teachers and students. Due to the researcher's incapability to explore all those mentioned problems, he limited this study to investigate the strategies that the teachers applied and challenges that teachers faced to develop students' critical thinking at the EED of UMY in applying the strategies.

The limitation of this study is only to find out the strategies that the teachers applied in developing students' critical thinking and challenges which teachers face when they created activities aiming at encouraging students' to think critically in order to improve students' critical thinking.

Research Questions

Based on the background of the study, the researcher formulated two research questions. The research questions are:

1. What are the EED of UMY teachers' strategies in developing students' critical thinking?
2. What are the challenges that teachers of the EED of UMY face to develop students' critical thinking in applying the strategies?

Purposes of the Study

Based on the research questions, the purposes of this study are:

1. To find out the strategies applied by teachers of the EED of UMY in developing students' critical thinking.
2. To investigate the challenges that teachers' face to developing students' critical thinking at the EED of UMY in applying the strategies.

Significance of the Study

This research aims at giving advantages specifically to the researcher, lecturers, and students.

The researcher. As a prospective teacher, this research may give the researcher more knowledge of the challenges that teachers confront when developing students' critical thinking. He will also be able to improve his critical

thinking teaching methods. Thus, it will be easier for him to design materials and activities at class.

Teachers. By knowing the strategies and challenges in developing students' critical thinking, teachers can implement creative ways in learning process to cope with the challenges.

Other researchers. This research is expected to enlighten the other researchers who concern with teachers' challenges and strategies to develop students' critical thinking. The finding of this research can be a reference for other researchers who conduct a similar study