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AN INVESTIGATION OF TEACHERS' QUESTIONING TECHNIQUE IN DEVELOPING EFL STUDENTS' CRITICAL THINKING ABILITY

NINDYA



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DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT
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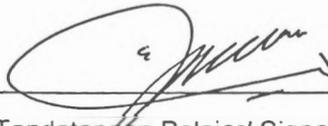
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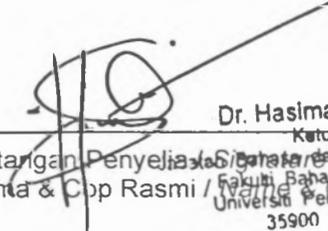
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ABSTRACT

This study was aimed to investigate teachers' questioning techniques in developing students' critical thinking ability that were common in the EFL classroom. This study also seeks to categorise the frequency of lower-order cognitive question and higher-order cognitive questions. The difficulties faced by the teachers during teachers' questioning sessions and how the teachers addressed the problems, and teachers' perspective on developing students' critical thinking through questioning were also examined. A case study design was selected for this study. Six English language teachers from a university in Indonesia were selected as participants through the purposive sampling method. The research instruments used in this study were classroom observation checklists and interview protocol. Data collected were analysed using thematic analysis and frequency counts. The findings showed that all participants used the six cognitive level questions based on Bloom's Taxonomy, they were knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. The results also indicated that the teachers asked lower-order questions more frequently. Students' background knowledge and English language proficiency level were the students' problems faced by the teachers during questioning. Students tend to keep silent during questioning. Different techniques were used by the teachers to elicit students' responses, they were repetition, rephrasing, simplification, decomposition and probing. Despite holding different perspectives concerning the development of students' critical thinking, all teachers were aware of questioning sessions conducted in the classroom can help the development of students' critical thinking ability. As a conclusion, appropriate types of questioning and questioning technique can help the development of students' critical thinking skills. The implication of this study suggested that the use of questioning would enhance students' critical thinking development and could raise awareness of the role of question types and questioning techniques in developing students' critical thinking.

PENYIASATAN TEKNIK SOAL JAWAB GURU DALAM MEMBANGUNKAN KEMAMPUAN PEMIKIRAN KRITIS PELAJAR *ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (EFL)*

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji teknik soal jawab yang digunakan oleh guru-guru di dalam kelas EFL berdasarkan Taksonomi Bloom dalam membangun pemikiran kritis pelajar. Kajian ini juga dijalankan untuk menentukan frekuensi soalan-soalan pada tahap pemikiran rendah dan tahap pemikiran tinggi. Turut dikaji adalah masalah yang dihadapi oleh guru dan bagaimana guru menyelesaikan masalah, serta perspektif guru dalam mengembangkan pemikiran kritikal dalam kalangan pelajar melalui soal jawab. Kajian kes melibatkan guru bahasa Inggeris dari sebuah universiti di Indonesia Enam guru telah dipilih sebagai peserta kajian menggunakan kaedah persampelan purposif. Instrumen digunakan adalah senarai semak sesi pemerhatian dalam kelas dan protokol temubual. Data yang diperolehi telah dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik dan kekerapan frekuensi. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa kesemua peserta menggunakan enam peringkat soalan kognitif berasaskan Taksonomi Bloom iaitu pengetahuan, pemahaman, aplikasi, analisis, sintesis, dan penilaian. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa guru-guru lebih banyak bertanya soalan-soalan pada tahap pemikiran rendah. Kemahiran berbahasa Inggeris pelajar serta kelemahan pelajar mengolah pengetahuan sedia ada adalah masalah pelajar yang dihadapi guru ketika sesi soal jawab dengan guru. Pelajar cenderung untuk mendiamkan diri semasa soal jawab. Guru juga menggunakan teknik yang berbeza untuk mendapatkan tindak balas pelajar seperti pengulangan, penegasan, pemudahan, penguraian dan pembelaan. Walaupun mempunyai perspektif yang berbeza mengenai perkembangan pemikiran kritikal pelajar, semua guru menyedari sesi soal jawab yang dijalankan dalam kelas dapat membangun kemahiran berfikir kritis pelajar. Sebagai kesimpulan, jenis soalan dan teknik soal jawab yang sesuai boleh membantu untuk membangun kemahiran berfikir kritis pelajar. Implikasi kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa penggunaan teknik soal jawab dapat meningkatkan perkembangan pemikiran kritis pelajar, dan dapat meningkatkan kesedaran tentang peranan jenis soalan dan teknik menyoal dalam membangun pemikiran kritis pelajar.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATION

EFL English as a Foreign Language

APPENDIX LISTS

- A Classroom Observation Checklist 1
Questions Categorisation Sheet
- B Classroom Observation Checklist 2
Questions Techniques Categorisation Sheet
- C Interview Protocol
- D Informed Consent Form for Participant
- E Sample of Questions used by the Teachers in the EFL Classroom
- F Observation Result Checklist I
- G Sample of Question Techniques used by the Teachers in the EFL
Classroom
- H Sample of Interview Transcript

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The emphasis on 21st century learning has become a hot issue in the field of education. Recently, the 21st century era has influenced the education system focusing on developing students' higher-order thinking, particularly in critical thinking. Critical thinking has been identified as one of the learning and innovation skills that is necessary to prepare students for higher education. In higher education, critical thinking is highly desirable. According to Hapsari (2016) in her study, it is important to develop critical thinking to support education because critical thinking can assist students to be mature in making their own decisions. She highlights that critical thinking is a process of reorganizing ideas to higher level action by thinking actively

and carefully so the students can focus on it and make a decision as to what they must trust or do. Therefore, critical thinking is not only a thinking process but also making the right judgment on a decision.

Educators and educational researchers have been concerned with critical thinking issues, especially in the way to develop it. Feng (2014) believed that critical thinking is teachable to students. There have been a few strategies used to develop university level students' critical thinking. Cooper (1995) as cited in Feng (2014) stated that the implementation of cooperative learning could promote students' critical thinking. Another study conducted by Khatib, Marefat and Ahmadi (2012) also showed that critical thinking can be developed through written and audiotaped dialogue journal. Studies conducted by Tung and Chang (2009) and Khatib and Nazari (2012) have also shown that discussing the point of view in literature can also help to enhance students' critical thinking in a literature EFL classroom. Another study conducted by Yang, Newby, and Bill (2005) recommended the use of Socratic questioning in the classroom to help in the development of students' critical thinking.

Developing students' critical thinking in the process of teaching English is important. Alwasilah (2001) believes that this would enable the students to uncover the essence of a message and to understand the implicit meaning. According to Emilia (2005), critical thinking not only helps in "improving students learning in EFL but also their critical capacities" (p. 276). Since a lot of current issues that are addressed in the classroom demand critical thinking, students are encouraged to express their points of view (Brown, 2001). Moreover, other experts also state that it is compulsory to effectively teach critical thinking in the classroom (Suhherdi, 2012; Reichenbach,

2001; Crawford et al, 2005; Weil & Anderson, 2000; Browne & Keeley, 2007). However, it is also believed that students have “performed critical thinking unconsciously and the teaching of critical thinking serves only to raise their awareness” (Dwijawandono, 2013, p. 44).

There are a variety of methods to develop critical thinking. Lee (2015) suggested teachers’ questioning as a way to develop students’ critical thinking as it stimulates thinking and learning. Questioning is used to stimulate students’ ideas, engage them in clarifying their thinking, assessing the evidence, making an inference, and promoting the depth and breadth of their thinking. The researchers agreed that questioning is essential to promote critical thinking skills, creative skills, and higher order thinking skills (Diaz, Whitacre & Esquierdo, 2013). In brief, the thinking process is not affected by answers, but it is driven by questions.

In teaching and learning English, there is a process which is called asking or giving questions. The questions can be given by the teacher to the students or the students to the teacher. Questioning must be applied in the classroom as one of the teaching strategies. Questioning is used to ask something to the students in gaining a purpose in teaching. In the teaching and learning process, it is important to conduct questioning sessions. It is in line with Qashoa (2013) who stated that questioning sessions could help to monitor students’ comprehension and questions can also make connections to students’ prior knowledge and stimulate students’ cognitive level.



In a classroom setting, teacher questions and students answer can be a powerful teaching approach if they are used to help the student to expose contradictions, challenge assumptions, and lead to new knowledge. Therefore teachers' questioning should expand students' knowledge and promote critical thinking. However, Cotton (2001) explained that not all questions are effective, as they depend on the content of the questions and the way teachers ask them. Thus, it is cognitively demanding to ask a good question in teaching and learning.

1.2 Statement of Problem

In higher level education, students must not only think in the lower order level, but they also have to reach the higher order thinking level. Based on Minister of Education and Culture's Regulation (permendikbud) No 54, 2014, Indonesia, it is compulsory for undergraduate level students to acquire analytical, argumentative, and critical thinking skill where students are reinforced to be more active in learning. Students should be able to make judgements, ask questions, reason, and communicate what they have learnt in class. However, based on PISA 2015 reported by the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), Indonesia ranked 62nd from 72 countries (OECD 2015). This result showed that most of the Indonesian students are lacking in the cognitive aspects, particularly in reasoning and to think critically. They are barely critical of the information given.





Consequently, in order to help the students' cognitive development particularly in critical thinking, the teacher has a big role to play. It is believed that questioning behaviour can trigger students' motivation and improve students' critical thinking (SA DeWaelche, 2015). However, during questioning, teachers seem not to realise that their questions would have an impact on students' critical thinking. The teacher asked questions without considering the type of questions asked (Yuliawati, Mahmud, & Muliati, 2016). Besides they also do not allocate much time for the students to formulate their answers. Hence, he or she does not get satisfactory responses from the students or even receive no responses at all. Teachers should ask the right type of question and provide wait time for students to formulate their answers. According to Tobin (1987) the time a teacher allows a student to respond as well as the time a teacher waits after a student's reply give an impact on students' thinking. A teacher who allows about three to five seconds between the question and expected responses permit students to trigger their thinking.



Nonetheless, questioning students in the classroom do not always work in some case regardless of the type of questions and strategies used by the teacher in the classroom. One of the major problems is the teacher sometimes failed in framing the right question. The right question is the one that is crafted to get the intended response from students. The teacher, sometimes in open-ended questions fails to encourage the students to speak more by answering the questions due to certain circumstances, such as the question asked is not understood by the students or the length of the question is too long.



The status of English as a foreign language for most Indonesian students also causes a problem during questioning. Based on English First English Proficiency Index (EF EPI) conducted by the international education company English First (EF) in 2016, Indonesia ranks 32nd out of 72 countries. With a score of 52.91, the study placed Indonesia below Vietnam, which ranked 31st and fell under the Moderate Proficiency Band category. It means English remains as an unfamiliar language for most students in Indonesia, particularly in rural areas. Students with low to moderate English language proficiency find it difficult to understand the lesson when it is delivered in English language. Hence, asking unclear questions will make students more confused and remained silent. Therefore, it is essential to not only focus on the types of questions but also the questioning strategy and question levels that teachers used to create and maintain the interactive classroom interaction (Brown, 2001).

Thus it is necessary for teachers to know the hierarchy of lower order cognitive questions and higher order cognitive questions, and apply questioning techniques in the classroom. However, being familiar with the type of questions is not always sufficient during the questioning session. Students sometimes do not give any responses. Then, the teacher needs to modify or follow up on their questions.

Examining teachers' questioning is important because the use of various cognitive levels of questions can improve students' critical thinking. Therefore the main purpose of this present study is to identify the types of questions and how far teachers' questioning had developed the critical thinking skills of the undergraduate level students in the EFL classroom.

In this study, the questions asked by the teacher during EFL lessons were categorised based on the cognitive levels in Bloom's (1956) Taxonomy which are (i) knowledge, (ii) comprehension, (iii) application, (iv) analysis, (v) synthesis and (vi) evaluation. It will help the researcher to learn how far teachers' questioning had developed thinking skills in general and higher order thinking skills in particular. Besides, this study is in line with the Indonesian government's emphasis on thinking skills in education.

1.3 Purposes of the Study

The aim of the study was to examine the type of questions that were common in the EFL classroom. This study also seeks to categorise the type of questions asked based on the six cognitive levels of learning in Bloom's Taxonomy. In addition, this study also seeks to identify the difficulties faced by teachers during questioning and how they overcome the problem. Another purpose of this study is to examine the teachers' perspectives on developing critical thinking skill through questioning.

1.4 Research Objectives

Following are the objectives of the study:

1. To categorise the type of questions teachers used in the classroom according to the respective levels in Bloom's Taxonomy.
2. To determine the frequencies of lower-order cognitive questions and higher-order cognitive questions asked in the classroom.
3. To identify the difficulties faced by the teachers during teachers' questioning sessions in the classroom and to find out the strategies used by the teacher to overcome the difficulties during teacher questioning in the classroom.
4. To examine teachers' perspectives on developing critical thinking skills through questioning.

1.5 Research Questions

The current study seeks to address the following research questions.

1. What are the types of questions used by teachers in teaching English for undergraduate students?
2. What are the frequencies of lower-order questions as opposed to higher-order questions?
3. What are the difficulties faced by the teachers during teachers' questioning in teaching English? How do they overcome the difficulties?
4. From the teachers' perspectives, how can students' critical thinking skills through questioning be developed?

1.6 Significance of the Study

It is hoped that the findings obtained from this study will contribute to the body of knowledge especially on the issue of EFL teaching in Indonesia. Besides, this study also helps to raise awareness of the importance of developing critical thinking of English language teachers and also future English language teachers. Teachers of English language will particularly benefit from this study, as the findings will provide guidance for them to carefully select and prepare questions which can facilitate students' thinking skills.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms in the Study

The following are the definitions of the key terms used in this study. The general definitions, as well as the specific definitions referring to the context of this study, are presented and discussed.

1.7.1 Teacher Questioning

Cotton (2001) states that teacher questioning in the classroom setting is defined as instructional cues or stimuli that the teacher convey to students about content elements to be learned and directions for what they are doing and how they are to do it. They are generally implemented by teachers in the classroom in order to promote interaction in the teaching-learning process and to stimulate language production of the students.

In the context of this study, teacher questioning is a session where questions were asked by the teacher in order to check students' understanding and to generate students' thinking through the various levels of questions posed.

1.7.2 Higher-Order Cognitive Questions

These types of questions encourage students to analyse information in order to discover reasons or causes, to draw conclusions or generalisations. Higher-order cognitive questions also require students' creative and evaluative thinking such as making predictions, solving a problem, and producing original ideas or information (McComas & Abraham, 2004).

In the context of this study, higher-order cognitive questions require students to use higher order thinking or their reasoning skills which allow students to explore different avenues and create many different variations and alternative answers or scenarios. This level also usually requires sophisticated levels of cognitive or emotional judgment.

1.7.3 Lower-Order Cognitive Questions

These types of questions not only require factual recall but also require students to think productively. These questions also demonstrate the students' understanding. Lower order cognitive questions are aligned with knowledge, comprehension, and application (McComas & Abraham, 2004).

Lower order cognitive questions in this study refer to questions that require the students to give reasonable, simple, and straightforward answers based on the obvious facts and awareness. Usually, these types of questions require students' knowledge of the information they have learnt or known.

1.7.4 Critical Thinking Skills

Critical thinking skills involve one's thinking process of information through analysis, synthesis, interpretation, explanation, evaluation, generalisation, abstraction, application, comparison and contrast (McPeck, 2016). Critical thinking means the ability of a student to deduce information from what he knows, and how to make use of the information to solve problems and also to seek relevant sources of information to inform himself. In short, critical thinking means making reasonable and logical judgment toward information after deep thinking or questioning the information.

1.8. Chapter Summary

This chapter elaborated on the background of the study, research questions, objectives of the study, and the significance of the study. The statement of the problem discussed the reason why the researcher conducted her study. The research questions were developed to examine teachers' questioning during English teaching and learning in the classroom. It is hoped that the results of the study will help to improve EFL teaching in Indonesia. This chapter also discussed the definition of terms used in this study. The next chapter will discuss the selected theoretical framework related to this study.