

PERSPECTIVES OF EFL STUDENTS ON ACQUIRING CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS IN THE ENGLISH DEBATE COURSE

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ABSTRACT

Berpikir kritis adalah kompetensi abad ke-21 yang penting bagi pelajar EFL, dan debat dianggap sebagai metode yang efektif untuk mengembangkannya. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui perspektif mahasiswa tentang perolehan keterampilan berpikir kritis melalui mata kuliah debat bahasa Inggris, khususnya dalam format Debat Parlemen Australia, dengan menggunakan enam keterampilan inti dari Facione (1990) yaitu interpretasi, analisis, evaluasi, kesimpulan, penjelasan, dan pengaturan diri sebagai kerangka kerja. Sebuah studi kasus kualitatif digunakan untuk mengumpulkan data dari lima mahasiswa pendidikan bahasa Inggris di sebuah universitas di Bogor melalui kuesioner dan wawancara semi-terstruktur. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa keenam keterampilan tersebut dapat diperoleh melalui debat, dengan interpretasi, evaluasi, dan analisis yang paling menonjol. Temuan ini menyimpulkan bahwa debat dapat menjadi alat pembelajaran yang bermanfaat, tetapi efektivitasnya bergantung pada keterlibatan aktif dan kesadaran siswa.

Kata kunci: Mahasiswa EFL, Berpikir Kritis, Debat Bahasa Inggris, dan Perspektif Mahasiswa

ABSTRACT

Critical thinking is a vital 21st-century competency for EFL learners, and debate is considered an effective method to foster it. This study aims to find out students' perspectives on the acquisition of critical thinking skills through English debate courses, especially in the Australian Parliamentary Debate format, using Facione's (1990) six core skills interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation as a framework. A qualitative case study was used to gather data from five English education students at a university in Bogor through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Results indicate that all six skills can be acquired through debate, with interpretation, evaluation, and analysis being the most prominent. The findings concluded that debate can serve as a beneficial learning tool, but its effectiveness relies on the active involvement and awareness of students.

Keyword: EFL Students, Critical Thinking, English Debate, and Student Perspectives

INTRODUCTION

Critical thinking is a fundamental 21st-century skill essential for navigating academic and professional contexts (Rahardhian, 2022). For EFL learners, critical thinking enriches not only language acquisition but also problem-solving and decision-making abilities. Critical thinking abilities are not something that can be learned quickly or easily; it must be developed and practiced deliberately (Nadliroh, 2022). So, this is not something that can be mastered instantly. Continuous practice and assessment are necessary to build and maintain critical thinking skills.

Debate is recognized as a dynamic method for cultivating critical thinking (Dewangga et al., 2024). But current research often only looks at speaking performance or specific thinking skills, leaving a gap in knowledge about how students acquire critical thinking skills through structured debate formats such as the Australian Parliamentary model.

This research addresses that gap by finding out students' perspectives on how debates help them to think critically, as seen through the six sub-skills proposed by Facione (1990). Each skill consists of several sub-skills. To conduct this

study, the researchers identified one sub-skill from each of the main skills to use as a reference, namely: Clarifying meaning is one of the sub-skills of the interpretation, analyzing arguments is one of the sub-skills of the analysis, evaluating arguments is one of the sub-skills of the evaluation, drawing conclusions is one of the sub-skills of the inference, presenting arguments is one of the sub-skills of the explanation, and self-correction is one of the sub-skills of the self-regulation. Thus, the results of this study are expected to provide deeper insights into the effectiveness of debates in acquiring critical thinking as well as provide recommendations for the development of debate-based learning methods in EFL classrooms.

METHOD

Perspectives EFL students' on acquiring critical thinking through an English debate course were investigated in this study using a qualitative case study methodology. Five students from a Bogor university's English Education program who had completed an Australian Parliamentary debate course participated. The frequency of replies was calculated to assess the questionnaire data, and method triangulation was used to assure validity by thematically analyzing and comparing the interview transcripts with the questionnaire results.

Data were collected through two methods: a closed questionnaire based on Facione's (1990) six sub-skills of critical thinking, and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire sought students' perspectives on the acquisition of each critical thinking sub-skill and to find out which stage of the debate they found most influential. As to find out the interviews provided deeper insights into their experiences. The questionnaire data were analysed by calculating the frequency of responses, while the interview transcripts were thematically analysed and compared with the questionnaire results to ensure validity through method triangulation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study find out two problems, namely: (1) EFL students' general perspectives on acquiring critical thinking in the debate course, (2) EFL students' perspectives on critical thinking

sub-skills acquired through debate courses. It can be seen on the statement below:

First, all participants strongly agreed that the English debate class helped them acquire critical thinking skills, according to the results of the questionnaire and interviews. Debate class encouraged students in quick and accurate thinking within a limited time, trains them to analyze and evaluate information before concluding, familiarize them with the search for data and the strengthening of opinions based on facts. This general perspective is seen through the critical thinking sub-skills of Facione (1990) shown as follows.

Second, of the six sub-skills found that: (1) the interpretation skill, particularly the sub-skill of clarifying meaning, was consistently perceived by students as being acquired through debate. They reported becoming more accustomed to avoiding ambiguity, ensuring clarity in communication, and presenting arguments supported by clear evidence and explanations. (2) analysis skills, particularly the sub-skills of analysing arguments. was affirmed by all participants in the questionnaire. However, interview data revealed some variation. According to four out of five participants in the interviews, the debating experience helped them get more accustomed to double-checking information with reliable sources in order to ensure the arguments are reliable. One participant, however, disagreed, claiming that the debate course had no impact on this skill because they were uninterested in the debate subjects covered. This implies that while debate helped the majority of students enhance their analytical abilities, individual motivation and topic relevance also had an impact on the degree of skill growth. (3) The evaluation skill, particularly the sub-skill argument evaluation, was consistently perceived by all participants as being acquired through debate. Students reported being more critical and careful in constructing arguments supported by evidence and identifying weaknesses in opposing arguments. While some emphasized the habit of gathering data to support their points, others highlighted their improved ability to spot flaws in others' reasoning, both in academic and everyday contexts. (4) Inference skills, particularly the sub-skills of draw conclusions was affirmed by all participants in the questionnaire. However, interview data revealed

some variation. Three students stated that debates helped them connect and compare conflicting information to make objective conclusions. However, two students felt they did not gain this skill from debates, as they were rarely the last speaker in charge of summarizing arguments. Nonetheless, the majority agreed that debates contributed to their ability to process information and reason logically. (5) The explanation skill, particularly the sub-skills of presenting arguments, was affirmed by all participants in the questionnaire. However, interview data revealed some variation. Four participants acknowledged that debate helped them develop this skill by encouraging the use of valid sources and considering opposing viewpoints. One participant, however, believed this skill was more influenced by daily communication experiences than by debate activities. Despite this, the majority agreed that debate contributed to their ability to deliver well-structured, persuasive arguments. (6) The self-regulation skill, particularly the sub-skills of self-correction, was affirmed by all participants in the questionnaire. Most participants stated that debate helped them acquire habits of self-correction by openness to criticism, and reflective thinking. However, one participant did not associate debate with revising personal opinions, viewing it more as an opportunity to give advice than to reflect critically. Despite this, the majority considered debate valuable in fostering self-awareness and evaluative thinking.

The results of this study revealed two main problems related to EFL students' perspectives on developing critical thinking skills through classroom debates. First, all participants agreed that debate classes supported the acquisition of their critical thinking by encouraging quick and accurate reasoning under time constraints, promoting the analysis and evaluation of information before drawing conclusions, and cultivating habits of data gathering and evidence-based argumentation. This is supported by Vu (2023) who shows that all participants felt that debates helped them develop their critical thinking abilities.

Using Facione (1990) framework, six critical thinking sub-skills were identified as a result of participating in debates: interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation. This study shows that debates can

contribute to the acquisition of Facione's six sub-skills. Although the majority of students recognized an improvement in each of these sub-skills, the perceived level of acquisition varied between individuals, and the researchers concluded the sub-skills were most acquired through debates by students, as follow:

Based on the research findings, the critical thinking sub-skills most experienced by students in English debate courses is interpretation, because all participants acquired the clarifying meaning sub-skills in the debate. This finding is supported by Sahril et al., (2020) who found that engaging in debate helps enhance the clarity and effectiveness of their speaking skills and boost their confidence in public speaking. Student were accustomed to ensuring that their messages were clearly understood by the interlocutor and often repeated or re-explained potentially confusing concepts. Second, the evaluation, because all participants acquired argument evaluation sub-skills in the debate. Through rebuttal exercises, students are accustomed to collecting and using evidence to evaluate their arguments, and accustomed to seeing gaps or weaknesses in their opponents' arguments. These findings were supported by Majidi et al. (2021), who said that students who participate in debate are forced to look for, examine, and assess ideas; spot contradictions and weaknesses in opponents' arguments. In third place was analysis, most student acquired this sub-skill, only one student did not feel that this sub-skill was in the acquisition of critical thinking in debate encouraged them not to immediately believe in the information received, feel accustomed to searching, and verifying arguments from valid sources. These findings were supported by Suraya et al. (2019) that the application of the debate method makes students more active in thinking by carrying out analysis to the real problems around them thus creating a deep impression in learning. Fourth, explanation because one participant considered these sub-skills less important in a debate class, but four stated that they acquired argumentation skills due to their active involvement in debates, especially as they became accustomed to processing information from various sources and viewpoints. These findings is supported by Mackay et al. (2022) who said that students must conduct more

in-depth research for debate in order to weigh both sides of the issue and make strong arguments as a team. Fifth self-regulation because one participant considered this sub-skills less important in a debate class, but four of the five students revealed that debates assisted them to actively engaging in self-correction through evaluating opposing arguments, identifying weaknesses in their own reasoning. These findings are supported by Dewangga et al. (2024) that showed an increase in students' ability to identify assumptions, consider different perspectives, and develop reasonable conclusions in debates. The lowest level of sub-skills in this research was inference, because two participants stated that they rarely had the role of closing the debate, so they did not feel accustomed to concluding arguments, however three of the five participants stated that the debate helped them gather and compare information from various sources. This finding was supported by Abir, (2019) who stated that debate in the classroom enables students to think critically, see problems from several angles, draw clear conclusions, and get reliable information.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore perspectives of EFL students on the acquisition of critical thinking skills through English Debate courses, specifically using the Australian Parliamentary format, through six critical thinking sub-skills proposed by Facione (1990): clarifying meaning, analyzing argument, argument evaluation, drawing conclusion, presenting argument, and self-correction. The findings reveal that students generally hold positive perceptions regarding the role of debate in fostering these sub-skills. Among the six sub-skills, clarify meaning was the most frequently acquired and practiced, as students regularly engaged in ensuring clarity during argument construction and presentation. Conversely, draw conclusions was seen as the least acquired skill, because not all students had the opportunity to serve as the final speaker who concludes the debate, limiting their direct experience in practicing this cognitive function. Considering the findings of this study, it is suggested that future debate courses integrate structured reflection alongside argument practice to support the balanced development of all six

critical thinking sub-skills—especially inference and self-regulation—while future research is encouraged to involve more diverse participants and explore various debate formats to provide a deeper understanding of how debate can enhance critical thinking in different EFL learning contexts.

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