

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter as an introductory section supplies the conceptual background and an overview of the present study and discusses selected theoretical and empirical studies. It comprises background, research questions, aims of the study, significance of the study, scope of the study, definition of key terms, and organization of the paper.

1.1 Background of the Study

Human quality of life is primarily determined by his/her thinking (Elder and Paul, 2013:1). Critical thinking is a highly valued life competence needed to succeed in the age of technology and information (Paul and Elder, 2002). Recently, students are facing the world developments in which the advances of technology and information do not only give them the advantages but also bring negative influences from mass culture such as broadcast media, newspapers, magazines, internet and popular music (Ruggiero, 2009). Further, he states that individuals are under the bombardment of messages, issues, slogans and propagandas, and hence, they should respond to what they read and hear critically in order to avoid being unknowingly and negatively influenced (Che, 2002).

To do otherwise, they could be susceptible to undesirable consequences of being victims to persuasion (Ruggiero, 2009). Such cases as consumers who are tricked by advertiser's blandishments, voters who are wooed by politicians' campaign, TV audience wasting time on pure dross of TV and innocent girls who fall into man's trap by trusting easily his flattery are examples of the disadvantages caused by the lack or absence of critical, logical or rational thinking in mind (Nickerson as cited in Kurfiss, 1988).

According to Paul and Elder (2002: 1) the accelerating change and complexity of life in global realities demand "a radically different form of thinking", that is critical thinking. In their view, critical thinking skills could be

the key for individuals to successfully take part in such a complicated life. Critical thinking is the way to cope with so much circulating information and so many people trying to assure others (Epstein, 2006). Further, Epstein explains that critical thoughts lead individuals to think in a more systematic and guided way in making any decision. It means when facing issue or problem critical individuals think over it on the basis of their own thinking without another person's influence.

Thus, applying such critical thinking technique as considering ideas thoroughly and judging argument in open-minded way could help individuals to be sure about the decisions upon which their actions or beliefs are based. In daily life, critical thinking could help them avoid making fallacious judgment that is at risk of failure. Nickerson (as cited in Kurfiss, 1988) states that most failure is not caused by lack of knowledge, rather it is because of human irrationality.

In the context of secondary education, the importance of critical thinking skills for students of junior high school is by all means not merely to sort and filter information and to avoid its bad effects, but also to help their intellectual developments (Freseman, 1990; Kagan, 1988 and Matthews, 1989). Another advantage of having the ability to think clearly and critically is that students can live successfully in their society (Hayes and Devitt, 2008). Thus, the ability to think critically is essential to succeed both academically and socially.

In classroom context, the ability to think clearly and critically is essential to make sense of content of any discipline. Applying critical thinking in the learning process, students could evaluate issues or arguments on the topics they are learning in a deeper and broader way through the process of reasoning for the purpose of developing their knowledge (Bassham et al., 2011).

In the social context, critical thinking skills help students to live better within community. Living in community, students are often faced with problematic matters of life in their surroundings that demand them to be good thinkers as well as problem solvers. They can use good thinking as the guide for being productive, contributive and responsible community members. "Critical thinking, honestly and courageously pursued, can help free us from the

unexamined assumptions and biases of our upbringing and our society” (Bassham et al., 2011).

The need for critical thinking as an outcome of education has been widely recognized. Bell (2003), Day (2003) and Long (2000) assert that it is of paramount importance to set skillful thinking as the goal of education. UNESCO (2005) states that “many educators now agree that the most effective and enduring approach to counteracting the pressures and influences faced by young people is to teach critical thinking skills, judgment and discerning insight, focusing on the process of values formation” (p.9).

In the Indonesian context, critical thinking skills have been the educational objectives of any discipline. The 2003 National Education System Act of Indonesia stated that the quality of Indonesian human resource needs to be increased and developed continuously to fulfill the demand of the globalized era. One of the ways to improve the quality of Indonesian human resources is by equipping them with ability to think critically (Ministry of National Education, 2009). Curriculum 2006 states that Science and technology, one of Subject Clusters and Scopes at junior high school, is intended to develop basic competency in knowledge and science as well as to enhance the learners’ habit of scientific thinking critically, creatively, and independently (Depdiknas, 2006). Moreover, Curriculum 2006 has set critical thinking ability as one of the Competence Standards for junior high school graduates as stated in Ministerial Regulations No. 23 of 2006 (framework standard or Graduate Competence Standard) as follows: 1) to search and implement information from their environment and other sources logically, critically, and creatively and 2) to demonstrate the ability to think logically, critically, creatively, and innovatively.

Neither is critical thinking innate ability nor the skill develops by its own in individuals along with the development of their age and experience (Schafersman, 1991). Rather it is the ability one can acquire through learning experiences in a formal instruction. Including critical thinking in English education through the explicit and direct teaching of four basic language skills enables students to

engage in a process that encourage them to evolve their potential of thinking skills (King, 1995; Yang, Newby & Bill, 2005 and Khatib & Nazari 2012).

To realize this, English teachers should point up more on designing learning experience that enables students to empower their thinking. Teachers should not only teach four basic language skills comprising listening, speaking, reading and writing but also foster critical thinking skills through them (Alwasilah, 2010). Accordingly, the outcomes of teaching language are students who are able to not only use language well as a means of communication but also become critical language learners.

Fostering critical thinking through formal instruction can be done by implementing particular teaching methodology, teaching media and learning materials. For example, Khodadady and Ghanizadeh (2011) investigate the efficacy of concept mapping. Khatib, Marefat and Ahmadi (2012) explore written and audio-taped dialogue journals. Thadphoothon (2005) focuses on media, especially computer network, combined with collaborative learning. Tung and Yang (2009) explore reading literary works or literature.

In terms of teaching methodology for teaching critical thinking, there are a lot of techniques, methods or strategies that can be used to promote students' critical thinking skills and disposition. One of the strategies that is commonly used by teacher to enhance students' critical thinking skills and disposition is questioning. It is an instructional technique using teacher's questions to direct students' thinking and learning. The notion that teacher's questions are crucial to learning process is that "thinking is driven by questions, not answers" (Elder & Paul, 1998). Moreover the level of students' thought depends on the level of question posed by teachers.

Teacher's questions serve as stimulus to students' responses ranging from simple recall of information to abstract processes of applying, synthesizing, and evaluating information (Zepeda, 2009). When a teacher poses questions and students give response to the questions, a classroom interaction occurs. Such interaction will continue when the students' answer generates a further question

(Elder & Paul, 1998). The continuing interaction makes the students keep on thinking and learning.

Using Guiding Questions in questioning means applying teacher's questions which are planned and constructed in such a way that they can provoke students' thinking and help them demonstrate intended responses. Additionally, the guiding questions that are used in learning process can lead students to participate in guided in-class discussion (Tung and Chang, 2009). Through questioning process students are demanded to respond actively to questions in all levels of cognitive domains in the classroom practices. Active classroom interactions in which thought provoking or stimulating questions are asked become a learning environment that provides learning experience for the students to demonstrate and practice critical thinking skills and disposition (Brown & Kelley, 1986).

However, even though using teacher's questions in questioning has been reported to be effective in promoting critical thinking through reading, most English teachers in Indonesia tend to just use the questions available on the text books that are in fact asking lower-level thinking. Besides, there has been very little research reporting the effectiveness of the teaching strategy, especially at junior high school level. Most of the research on this area was conducted at tertiary level of education. Moreover, the majority of the research was quantitative in nature emphasizing on students' attainment as a result of specific pedagogical treatment (Higgins et al., 2004). The recent study, hence, sought to fill in the gap in this research area. The study attempted to explore the classroom practices in EFL classroom and collect empirical evidence that allowed reasonable conclusions as to how the implementation of Guiding Questions in teaching reading influenced both learning process and outcomes dealing with the development of students' critical thinking skills as well as students' perceptions towards the instruction implemented.

1.2 Research Questions

Given with the abovementioned context, this research attempted to answer the following questions:

- 1) How do students' critical thinking skills develop through critical thinking-based reading instruction using Guiding Questions?
- 2) How do students perceive the use of Guiding Questions in critical-thinking-based reading instruction?

1.3 Aims of the Study

The overall purpose of this study is to highlight the importance of critical thinking in education and investigate the phenomena of teaching reading narrative text specifically designed to develop students' critical thinking in EFL classes in junior high school. In addition, this study is also intended to raise awareness of teachers as educational practitioners of the importance of such valuable skill. The results of this study are expected to develop a framework of instruction that is effective in nurturing critical thinking.

More specifically, this study focuses on exploring: 1) the development of students' critical thinking skills and dispositions through classroom practices of reading narrative texts in which Guiding Questions are implemented in English classes of a junior high school, and 2) disclosing the responses that are demonstrated by students of junior high school during the implementation of Guiding Questions in the teaching of reading narrative text.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is expected to contribute theoretically, practically and professionally to the growing body of research, teachers, students, other researchers and Indonesian education in general. From theoretical viewpoint, the findings of this research hopefully enrich the existing theories in the area of critical thinking, especially on how to infuse it through reading classroom practices at junior school in EFL context.

Practically, the results of this study will provide teachers with a valuable insight on how to use Guiding Questions in the teaching of reading to develop critical thinking skills and disposition. The findings of this study are expected to provide them with ideas and suggestions of how to manage effective learning experience. The nature of the reading instruction in which Guiding Questions is implemented could not only avoid the emphasis on the memorization of information but also enhance reasoning ability to deal with complex tasks that involve complex thinking so that they can nurture critical thinking and disposition. The implementation of Guiding Questions in the classroom practices of reading might be helpful for students to develop their critical thinking and disposition both as a life skill and academic success.

Professionally, inasmuch as the central focus of this study is to investigate the value of Guiding Questions on students' critical thinking and disposition, English teachers and the school may have the description on the development of the students' reading and thinking skills. Other researchers, especially, those who are interested in conducting research on the same area may take the results of this study into account as reinforcing reference. Guiding Questions used in questioning may be taken into consideration as one of the strategies that could effectively promote students' critical thinking ability.

1.5 Scope of the Study

This study limits the investigation on two aspects. Firstly, it focuses on investigating whether or not the implementation of in the teaching of Guiding Questions in teaching reading narrative texts promotes students' critical thinking skills. Guiding Questions used in this study are specifically designed for teaching reading narrative texts. In this study, the students were encouraged to reflect on what they read and discuss their point of views and practice to be critical readers who can “question, organize, interpret, synthesize, and digest what they read” (Paul as cited in Xu, 2011). The context of this research is limited to teaching reading at junior high school, especially to 8th grade students.

Secondly, critical thinking includes a wide range of skills. The current study does not largely concern all aspects of critical thinking. Rather, it focuses only on some components that are compatible and can be developed through reading instruction.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

Critical thinking is defined as the process through which individuals consciously and deliberately involve a set of cognitive skills like analyzing, synthesizing, evaluating and reasoning to make sense of both written or spoken text on the bases of criteria they have in order to draw reasonable conclusion about the text.

Critical reading refers to applying critical thinking to the process of reading texts; readers are consciously and deliberately involved in the process of comprehending, interpreting, evaluating and reasoning critically the text they read to make reasonable decisions about the information as they read it.

Guiding questions refer to the fundamental queries that direct the starch for understanding (Traver, 1988). Guiding questions are a series of teacher questions in both spoken or written form that are prepared or planned before teaching and used in the act of questioning process before, during and after reading to provoke students' thinking and learning in active classroom interaction.

1.7 Organization of the Thesis

This thesis paper consists of 5 chapters and is organized as follows:

Chapter 1 as an introductory section supplies conceptual background and an overview of the present study and discusses selected theoretical and empirical studies. This chapter comprises background, research questions, aims of the study, significance of the study, scope of the study, definition of key terms, and organization of the thesis.

Chapter 2 provides literature review concerning the main points of the theories underpinning the study and previous studies. It covers guiding question

strategy in teaching reading, the concept, skills and disposition of critical thinking, critical reading, schema theory, meta cognition theory, narrative text, five dimension of learning and Bloom's Taxonomy.

Chapter 3 discusses the research methodology and research design that are employed in the present study: a qualitative approach with single case study design. Participants, research procedure, data collection method, research instruments and data analysis techniques are also outlined. The summary of chapter 3 is included in the last part of this chapter.

Chapter 4 presents the development of students' critical thinking skills and students' perception toward the use of guiding question technique in critical thinking-based reading instruction. The last part of this chapter is summary of chapter four.

Chapter 5 provides the conclusion of the study and some recommendations for future research.