CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

As the beginning of the thesis, this chapter will outline the background of the study, scope of the research, research questions, aims of the study, significance of the study, and organization of the thesis.

1.1 Background

We live in the era which has been dubbed the Information Age (Diestler, 2001) driven mostly by the rapid change of information and technology. Moreover, the global knowledge of economy and job opportunities as Elder and Paul (2001) explain, place increasing demand on flexible intellectual skills with an outstanding ability to analyze information, utilize multiple ways of thinking and integrate diverse sources of knowledge in solving problems.

Apart from that, the ability to think critically is also considered as an essential means towards a democratic society as stated by Klentz, 1987; Gough, 1991; Beyer, 1985; and Nickerson, 1987, and thus applicable in the democratic era Indonesia is now facing. A critical thinker will tend not to be readily influenced by unclear and ambiguous information; as they will process and evaluate all information actively in order to make a reasonable decision on what to believe and do.

Realizing the importance of critical thinking in Indonesian education context, the government is now trying to apply and foster this thinking ability as stated in the latest curriculum, *KTSP (Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan)*. The thinking skill is considered as one of the skills relevant to life and resides in the fourth priority of the principles of education in Indonesia (www.depdiknas.go.id).

One of the concerns of this research is on infusing critical thinking into reading class. The infusion approach is one of the approaches in teaching critical thinking and has been selected for many reasons. Ennis (1989) describes the infusion approach as infusing the principles of critical thinking into the existing curricula. Swartz and Beyer (1995) refer to this approach as the direct and explicit approach of blending critical thinking instruction into subject matter (see for detail in Chapter 2, Section 2.4), and in the case of this study, into the reading subject

Given the importance of teaching thinking skills as inferred from the above illustrations, the present study attempted to apply critical thinking in classroom practices especially in Reading Skills in EFL context through the infusion approach.

1.2 Research Questions

This study is intended to answer the following questions:

a. Does the teaching of critical thinking through the infusion approach in the EFL context, specifically in reading skills, help to improve the students' abilities to read and think critically?

b. What challenges and problems faced by the researcher in teaching critical thinking through the infusion approach in reading class?

1.3 Aims of the Study

This research aimed at investigating the following:

- to explore the teaching of critical thinking through the infusion approach in the EFL context, specifically in reading subject and to find out whether the teaching program helps improve the students' abilities to read and think critically, and

- to identify the challenges and problems faced by the researcher during the teaching program

1.4 Scope of the Research

The teaching of critical thinking into reading in this particular study will be limited to the teaching of some skills and dispositions proposed by various experts in the field such as Ennis (1989); Paul (1991); Lipman (2003); Langrehr (1994); Fisher (2001); Moore and Parker (1995); Chaffee (2000) and Reichenbach (2001). The skills and dispositions for a critical thinker and critical reader are numerous as there are numerous theories. Nonetheless, in this research the teaching of critical thinking through the infusion approach in reading class will focus on the following skills and dispositions:

1. differentiating facts and opinions (Paul, 1991); detecting bias (Paul & Langrehr, 1994);

2. analyzing arguments; interpreting the author's intended meanings; seeing similarities and differences; describe and offer counterexample (Ennis, 1989);

3. formulating questions; support opinions with convincing reasons, recognize situational differences; seeks to clarify ill-defined concepts (Lipman, 2003);

4. open-minded; try to be well-informed; take and change a position when evidences are sufficient (Reichenbach, 2001);

5. use and mention credible sources; judging the credibility or a source; judging the source's reputation for reliability (Fisher, 2001);

6. viewing situation from different perspectives; mention, employ, and react to a kind of 'fallacy label' or 'fallacy of relevance' (Chaffee, 2000);

7. identifying the issue; maintaining the focus (Moore and Parker, 1995).

1.5 Significance of the Study

The present study is important because it aims at teaching critical thinking to the younger generation who live in a world of "modern technology and fast-paced change of information" as explained by Robinson (1987). Some experts such as Beyer-Marom (1987) and Facione (2006) believe that students need to be equipped with thinking skills necessary to acquire, understand, evaluate and process information in the most tactful manner. Thus this study helps them to draw the most reliable, logical, and trustworthy conclusions and make decisions with full knowledge of assumptions and consequences of those decisions as suggested by Schafersman (1991). This is done by the teaching of some skills and dispositions of critical thinking in reading class (see Section 1.4).

Moreover, the research site where the study was conducted is a teacher's institution. Hence it is relevant with two prominent figures in critical thinking movement, Paul and Elder (2004) who highlight the importance of teaching critical thinking to the future teachers. They agree that those who train prospective teachers should

> ... foster critical thinking or have at least a baseline knowledge of the concept of critical thinking. They must be sufficiently well-informed about critical thinking not only to be able to explain it in a general way to their students, they must also regularly model instruction for critical thinking in their own classroom procedures and policies. The design of their classes must reflect an explicit critical thinking orientation, so that students not only systematically think through the content of

their courses, but also come to see how the design of a course can require and cultivate critical thinking and thoughtfulness...(2004: 5).

Finally, the result of this study which is also concern with the teaching of critical thinking in reading is expected to shed lights on how to teach critical thinking and timely important for the contemporary Indonesian education which has required the inclusion of critical thinking in the teaching of various disciplines as stated by Emilia, 2005.

1.6 Organization of the Thesis

This thesis will be organized into the following chapters:

- Chapter 1 serves as the introduction to the thesis, outlining the background of the study, research questions, aims of the study, scope of the research and significance of the study

- Chapter 2 addresses literature review underpinning the research, presenting the concept of critical thinking, critical thinking and critical literacy (reading and writing), aspects of critical thinking and critical reading emphasized in the study, approaches to teaching critical thinking, principles of a thoughtful classroom to enhance critical thinking, and evaluating critical thinking;

- Chapter 3 presents research methodology comprising research design, research site and participants, data collection and data analysis;

- Chapter 4 integrates all data presentation and discussion, which detail data and discussion from classroom observation, interview, students' journals and written tests;

- Chapter 5 provides the conclusions of the thesis as well as limitations of the study and recommendation for further research.