

Chapter One

Introduction

This chapter provides the introduction of the study. There are several important points discussed in this chapter. First, the background of the study explains the researcher's interest in exploring the students' experiences and expectation in building critical thinking skills through small group discussion. The research questions as a guide for this study are featured in this chapter followed by the research' objectives. The significance of the study explains the benefits of this research for specific individuals. Finally, the chapter organization present the summary of each chapter.

Background of the Research

In the learning process, good techniques and methods will support the success of learning. Teachers and students are supposed to help each other to make this happen. As one of the learning methods to improve students' abilities, small group discussions are often implemented in helping students to achieve learning objectives. Group discussion is one of the teaching and learning activities that is familiar in ESL classrooms.

Various research reports have shown that working together in small groups improves learning performance (Roseth et. al, 2008). Therefore, there are many benefits that can be obtained from small group discussions. However, they are rarely discussed in depth, especially when it is related to the students' critical thinking skills. As one of the activities that is often carried out in class, group

discussions can be said to be one of many ways to build students' critical thinking skills. The ability to think critically is very important for students to have in order to see things in more detailed and wisely.

Several studies that have been conducted have found that small group discussions have quite an effect on students' academic abilities. Study from Fung et al. (2016) found that a series of one-way ANOVAs revealed that the pedagogical environment in which the experiment occurred had a strong impact on the three critical thinking dispositional aspects of self, open-mindedness, and judgement sophistication. The literature shows that as opposed to conventional models of learning, the small group discussion method is an effective method of residency training that improves their academic abilities. For example, a study done by Tabrizi et al. (2016), found that learners in the small group discussion performed slightly better on State Board exams than learners in the conventional teaching group. A series of recent studies has indicated the result of group discussion relating to open-mindedness. Through Fung's study (2016), the participant displays a high level of empathy for his classmates' contrary viewpoints. Rather than responding negatively, the participant consciously acknowledges his classmates' points of view and generously encourages them to expand on their suggestions. Arias et al. (2016) discovered that using small-group discussion approaches in dental education resulted in considerably improved results in preclinical skills. In addition, small group discussion had positive influence in the learning process.

The discussion of critical thinking skills is still very rarely studied in Indonesia. Although there are many studies concerning the implementation of small group discussion relating to critical thinking skills, the research in the same area in higher education remains limited. Especially the topic about methods for small group discussion and difficulties from students' perspective about small group discussion for critical thinking skill needs to be talked about more. Almost all research on this subject often uses quantitative method to compare learning outcomes between people who use small group conversations and those who do not. On the other hand, the researcher of this study will use qualitative method in order to get deeper information through participants' experience. Exploring various kinds of research on small group discussion is necessary to gain knowledge on strategies to build critical thinking skills by using small group discussion so that they can become knowledge for those who don't know, especially in the world of education so that it can be applied in the future.

In a private University in Yogyakarta, students from English Language Education Department (ELED) are already familiar with small group discussions because almost all courses use this method to achieve learning objectives. Even when online lectures were enforced due to Covid-19, each course still uses small group discussions in the learning process. It can be said that the small group discussion is quite popular among ELED students and all students already have experience in this matter. According to the students' own experiences, there are several courses that even use small group discussions to carry out almost all assignments in order to facilitate the work in the assignment.

However, based on the researcher's observation, some small group discussion on certain subjects are still ineffective in its implementation. This can be because students have different personalities and preferences, so sometimes group members and activities in the discussion are not suitable, especially to build critical thinking skills. Changwong (2018) stated that in current research, curricula that emphasize critical thinking practices and experience would clearly support all students at all academic levels.

Therefore, the researcher is interested to conduct a study on the implementation of small group discussion. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences from the students to build critical thinking skills through small group discussion and to find out the students' expectation in building critical thinking skill through small group discussion.

Identification of Problem

The learning process of ELED students often includes several methods in the classroom. Lecturers always have their own way of creating a smooth teaching and learning process. The researcher observed the use of small group discussions in the classroom. Through these observations, the researcher found some students who felt uncomfortable and found it difficult to convey ideas in small group discussions.

As one of the methods often used by ELED students, all students certainly have their own experiences when they are in a small group discussion. Small group discussion is applied for various reasons such as to make study work easier

and improve critical thinking skills. In addition, the students had several expectations in the small group discussion activity that had not got a chance to be revealed. In small group discussion activities, there are still students who feel they have not benefited a positive influence because of the strategy or the activity in the small group discussion is not effective. It needs to explore students' perceptions on how it should be applied in a small group discussion to build their critical thinking skills. The constraints or unpleasant experience felt by students in small group discussions might lead to the improvement of the learning activity specially to build critical thinking skills needs.

Besides small group discussion, there are ways to help improve critical thinking skills. Problem-based learning with the SETS (Science, Environment, Technology, and Society) technique, according to Alvionita, Prabowo, and Supardi (2020) is projected to engage students more involved in the process of acquiring knowledge directly, allowing them to build critical thinking abilities. Students will be able to grasp the idea of fluid dynamics in physics more quickly, making it easier for them to solve problems and develop critical thinking skills. Quitadamo et. al (2008) also found that CBI (Community-based Inquiry) has the ability to increase important academic achievement such as critical thinking, as well as the general population's cognitive productivity and competitiveness, as a research-based instructional strategy.

Delimitation of Problem

In this research, the researcher focuses on the students' experiences and expectation in building critical thinking skill through small group discussion. Although the small group discussion method is often carried out among ELED students, discussions about building critical thinking skills with this method are still very rarely discussed, so that the strategy and information on this matter is not in depth, so it is not done optimally. In order to make this analysis more efficient, the researchers restrict the study's exploration to a certain point. First, the researcher analyzed on the students' experience to build critical thinking skills through small group discussions. Second, the researcher explores the students' expectation in small group discussions in building critical thinking skills. Third, the participants for this study were limited to six students from ELED in an Islamic Private University in Yogyakarta. The researcher aimed to find out the students' perception on experience and expectation in building critical thinking skill through small group discussion using qualitative research approach.

Research Question

The researcher has formulated two research questions as a research guideline. The questions are:

1. What are students' experience in small group discussion in building their critical thinking skills?
2. What are students' expectation during small group discussions to help them build critical thinking skills?

The Objectives of the Research

Based on the research question, the objectives of the research are:

1. To explore on the students' experience in building critical thinking skills through small group discussion
2. To investigate the students' expectation during small group discussion to help them build critical thinking skills

The Significance of the Research

The study is intended to support and offers positive benefits in several areas for students, teachers, and potential researchers.

Students: This research is beneficial for the students as it provides the information on what students experienced during the small group discussion especially in building the students' critical thinking skills. Therefore, the students can be more aware of the benefits offered in the small group discussion especially in building their critical thinking skills.

Teachers: This research is beneficial for teachers as they are informed about what the students experienced in building their critical thinking skills through small group discussion. As a method that is often used, teachers can further understand more what students' impression is. Through this research, the teacher will also understand the expectation of students in the small group discussion and later might make their teaching using small group discussion more effective.

Future researchers: The findings of this research analysis can be used as a reference by other researchers who are interested in exploring the same area of study. The results of this research are also expected to be bases for those who want to research the same area of study from different perspectives and purposes.

Organization of the Chapters

This research contains five chapters. Chapter one consists of the background of the research, identification of the research, delimitation of the problem, research questions, objective of the research, and the significance of the research.

Chapter two is the literature review. It provides the general information of small group discussion, characteristics, strategies, steps in developing critical thinking skill through small group discussion, and bloom's taxonomy in critical thinking skills. This chapter explains the theory related to the overview on the use of small group discussion and conceptual framework.

Chapter three is the methodology. This chapter explains how the research was conducted by the researcher. This chapter discusses the methods, the instruments, the participants, settings, and data gathering techniques. In this chapter, the researcher also explains how to analyze the data.

Chapter four contains the finding and discussion. This chapter presents the result of data analysis. The findings include the students experience in small

group discussion especially in building their critical thinking skills. It also explored the students' expectation for the small group discussion.

Chapter five consists of the conclusion and recommendation. This chapter provides the summary of the study which present the general answers to the research questions and the recommendations from the researcher. The recommendations are to addressed to teachers, students, and other researchers.