

PROMOTING CRITICAL THINKING THROUGH ONLINE EDUCATION COMMUNITY TOOL

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Abstract

This study aims at figuring out whether online community education tool can be used as the platform fostering critical thinking skills of the users. Enhancing critical thinking involves increasing the skill to pursue solutions to nontrivial problems that can be done though asking questions, making inference, and communicating ideas. These skills are also required in English language interaction especially during the era of distant learning. In English language learning at Madrasah, the interaction strategies commonly used cover the classical method such as lecturing, question and answer and giving assignments. The use of social media helpful for language learning is not familiar. This study employs action research design collaborating with some High school teachers in Malang, Indonesia. It is significant for shaping the learners' critical thinking through the use of social media for English language learning method at madrasah level. It is also a significant step to develop critical thinking.

Keywords: modality, auxiliary, editorial texts. critical thinking, critical reading, critical writing, online language learning

INTRODUCTION

The English language learning in Madrasah today needs improvement as the common learning strategies used is the classical method such as lecturing, giving assignments and others (Wijayanti, 2001). Considering that the students in Madrasah get the less amount of English class and get more various course compared to those in state schools, more strategic learning method is essential to enhance the quality of English proficiency. In addition, the issue on integrating English language learning with critical thinking becomes more intense nowadays. Therefore, this study offers the use of structured task as a way to enhance Indonesian Madrasah students' critical thinking in foreign language learning.

Critical thinking skill is the competence on the use of reasoning and logic to decide what to believe or do based on conceptual and argument analysis for problem solving and

making decision (Paul and Elder, 2008). Unfortunately, after the reformation era in Indonesia, critical thinking is interpreted unwisely as the effort of finding fault of others particularly of government shown by sporadic action of demonstration conducted by students, labor or common people.

Critical thinking indeed has become an important cognitive skill which involves logical thinking and reasoning. It is stated in international benchmark of education by the idea to add reasoning into the current 3R literacy (reading, writing, arithmetic). The 4R basic competence (reading, writing, arithmetic, and reasoning), will in turn support student's both current and future life (Hayat and Yusuf, 2010; Depdiknas, 2004).

Improving critical thinking has been a main concern for improving the quality of students' competence in Indonesia. In fact, activating students' critical thinking is still becoming teachers' difficulty. Referring to the result of international survey of Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) in 2006, Indonesian students' reading competence are in the lowest position in East Asia with the literacy score below the average of international standard. Among the 50 countries surveyed, Indonesia is ranked 45. Students failed to understand the whole reading content, they only understood 30% of the text so that they get difficulties to answer reading comprehension and respond the reasoning prompt well (Hayat and Yusuf, 2010).

Current studies on critical thinking based instruction do not view the language phenomenon as the core concern. Some studies stress on improving literacy for better students' competence which can be done through critical thinking based instruction either in English as First Language or English as Second Language contexts (Depdiknas, 2004, Bensley et al. 2010; Hoefreiter et al., 2007). While other concern with the critical thinking instruction which is blended in writing course to see the benefits (Deal, 2004; Quitadamo and Kurtz, 2007; Reed, 1998). Critical thinking skills can be taught implicitly through some learning strategies experimented in some countries (Al-Fadli and Khaflan, 2009; Crook, 2006; Ernst and Monrow, 2004; Sellnow and Ahlfeldt, 2005). These studies are corroborated with the empirical bases of the implementation of critical thinking based instruction in language classroom.

Promoting critical thinking in language learning in relation to the use of social media becomes significant. Today, the use of social media has not been much linked to language learning. This study offers teachers with online community education tool, the type of social media which is helpful and beneficial for language learning. Some of the benefits include the enhancement of autonomous learning skill as it can be done out of the class independently, it involves various activities which also can be accessed for group work, and it supports the need to share interesting materials. In addition, the virtual learning environment is more manageable by the teacher as they can control students' expression, behavior through their utterance and can guide them to reach particular learning goal.

METHOD

The present study employs action research starting from preliminary study to identify the research problem, planning the action, implementing and monitoring the action, and reflecting the action through observation, interview and questionnaire (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1992). When the indicator of success is not fulfilled, the cycle is repeated until it reaches the objective of this study as it comes to the concluding remark.

In the planning for the action, the Madrasah teachers join three days tutorial to familiarize them with the use of online community education tool. In this case, the platform chosen is Edmodo. Then in implementing the action, students will also have the tutorial so that the project accomplishment can be done outside the class. As the first step, students registered on the site before participating in the online community education tool activities.

The data of this study is in the form of the written project executed in the form of accomplishment of the activities using the online community education tool. The activities involved the Madrasah students from some schools in Malang either from the state or private Madrasah Aliyah. The teachers post a new discussion topic and a help forum where students are able to elaborate on the information and interact with each other. The process of critical thinking improvement is observed during this stage. Then the students will also have their project using their own initiated topic. This project is conducted in a collaborative manner to promote social interactions as well as critical thinking.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Projects through Online Community Education Tool

There are eight projects accomplished during the implementation. Each of the project has different context and purpose with the target language skill involving reading and writing activities.

Project 1: Students' Responding Jokowi's Speech in APEC Conference.

The students provide different kinds of response regarding Jokowi's English speech in APEC Conference 2014. A number of students just say "hello" to their friends enjoying their practice communicating using online community education tool. Some of them are even using this media for chatting showing that they did not know what is all about the assignment. In regard to Jokowi's speech, some students argue that they did know about that, some said that Jokowi's English was good, but some other argued that his English was not good. Their argument is also completed with some supporting details such as their perspective on the impacts of the speech.

Project 2: Reading text

Students were given a text triggering their critical reading. From the reading questions given, the average score of their answer was 65 which is considered middle achiever. Among the five questions given, the reference question was the one which could be answered correctly by 96% of the students. It can be interpreted that the skill to identify

the easiest one because most of the students could answer it correctly. On the other hand, the most difficult question to answer was question on making inference, because there was only 29% of the number of the students who could answer it correctly. The second easiest questions to answer were question on identifying the major details and specific information, where 83% and 71% respectively of the students could answer those questions.

Project 3: Poem Appreciation

There were thirteen poems posted by the students. However, only some of them were responded positively by their peers. The students gave different responses regarding the poem. Some of them claimed that they did not understand what sort of poem it was. Other stated that it was a good poem, while other felt that it was a sad poem and they asked why the writer wrote such a sad one. None of them gave a substantial response of the poem. Some other poems were commented by very small number of the students. None of them provided constructive comments regarding the message of the poem, but they even accused that the writer copied and pasted the poem from other source. The poem regarding one's experience was commented by a few numbers of the students. Most of them used that poem as a material of conversation. This happens perhaps because the tone of the poem is just like a conversation, and it is very short.

There had been attempts from the students to give their comments in regard to the students' poems. The students' comments mostly were too short and did not substantially express the tone of the poems themselves, instead they used it as materials for free chatting. This happens because (1) perhaps they just began doing their homework by using online community education tool, where they could communicate and shared their ideas online, and (2) the students had no capacity to make a substantial analysis yet. The poems were thought by many students as the result of copy paste from other source.

Project 4: Responding to Letters

The instruction of project 4 is to respond on one of the three different letters. The students are assigned to choose one letter and give solution to the problem given by the writers of the letters. However, from the three letters given, no students choose the second letter. They prefer to choose either letter one or letter three.

In responding on letter one, most students have the same idea in giving solution to the writer of the letter (Elton). They disagree if Elton stops his study and job because his job is very important for paying his school fee and also his younger brother's medication. Furthermore, they said that education is very important for his future life so that he should not drop out from his school.

There are two students who give solutions to Elton to choose which one he prefers to choose. They suggest if Elton chooses to drop out from his school, he should focus on his job and keep his commitment because it is his own choice.

Besides giving solution to Elton, there is an interesting finding that can be found from the students' responses. All of them give motivation to Elton not to desparate easily and always believe that God is always with us. They also try to find solution that can help Elton to continue his study by pursuing a scholarship.

The responses of the students on the letter three show that all of the students give advice to Teagan to be a good listener for his friend who likes to tell her problem to him. They think that his friend always need Teagan to listen to her story and give his solution because she believes Teagan is not only a good listener but also a good friend who can be trusted. Therefore, Teagan should not refuse to help his friend. On the other hand, if he feels uncomfotable listening to his friend's problem, he should tell it patiently not to hurt his friend's feeling.

There are two findings that are interested to be noted from the students' responses. First, all students give a positive response or think positively in facing a problem. They do not give a solution to Teagan to do a negative thing, on the contrary, they try to find positive solutions. Second, there is a student said that as human beings we need other people and we should help others when they have a problem.

Project 5: Movie Appreciation

In Project 5, the students are assigned to give responses to certain teenage movies have been chosen by the teacher. The instruction is as follows:

Please appreciate these 3 following teenage movies to REVIEW their synopsis in conformity with YOUR or OTHER TEENAGERS' PERSPECTIVES.

Please use the following recommended links to support your ideas, which are the best movie to be watched by most teenagers' viewpoints.

Comment these following THREE movies and choose the best movie to be watched. Write your comments by clicking the icon 'reply' below. Do this movie appreciation within this week.

1. Jessabelle (2014) <http://www.film21bioskop.com/2014/06/film-jes...>
2. Annabelle (2014) <http://www.film21bioskop.com/2014/08/film-ann...>
3. Ouija (2014) <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1204977/synopsis?...>

The finding about the responses toward the three films, "Jessabelle", "Annabelle", and "Ouija" shows that the first favorite movie is "Ouija", the second favorite movie is "Annabelle" and the third favorite movie is "Jessabelle".

Students like "Ouija" movie because it does not only have an interesting scary movies, but because it also has a moral lesson. The moral lesson of the story is about friendship, helping each other, controlling emotion, and keeping spirit not easily give up when having a problem. "Annabelle" is the second favorite movie chosen by the students. They like watching that film since it has an interesting scary story and good movie in terms of the lighting, plot, setting. They think that an interesting horror movie is a movie that can make

them scared and entertain them. The followings are the students' responses toward "Annabelle" movie:

There are only four students who like watching Jessabelle. They think that it can make them scared and it has different ending that other movies. Even though it is a horror movie, but it has a sad ending. However, the sad ending can make them laugh. The followings are the students' responses on the letter.

Project 6: Responding arguments

The instruction of project 6 is to respond on two different arguments. The arguments are given in the form of conversation. The objective of the instruction is to elicit the students' viewpoint on the characteristics of good English teacher based on their experience. They can share their opinion, discuss and comment each other's view point.

Based on the responses, all of the students agree with the view point on the characteristics of good English teacher as reflected in the conversation. They support their opinion with some reasons such as their experience of learning English with good and qualified teachers. The students also responded the second questions using various supporting details. Regarding the quality of good English teacher, they can make some inferences which compare good teachers and incompetent teachers.

Project 7: Responding using self-reflection

The instruction of this project is similar with the previous project but with a different goal that is to identify the characteristics of a good English learners. The characteristics are implied in a short conversation.

There are different arguments given by the students on the characteristics of good learners. Some of them favor the quality of English learner who is active in class while the rest prefers the respected students. On the second questions, more students realized themselves as being shy learners in class. They prefer to be silent. Sometimes they can tell what was in their mind particularly on the topic which has not been understood. More students feel hesitated to ask questions and give opinions in public. Through this project, the students respond an issue using their own reflection of learning English process.

Project 8: Reflecting on the learning

In this project, the students are supposed to think about the online community education tool class they have been joining. They need to reflect on whether they like the learning through this educative social media or not. They need to give comment on whether online community education tool is suitable to be used in other class or if the program can be suggested to use by other teachers in their school. In addition, they should give their view point on e-learning or virtual class with the situation given below.

Now, let's imagine that we are in 100% internet free connection for 24 hours a day. We can conduct classes only through online community education tool, virtual class. You don't have to get up early in the morning to prepare for school, get busy with the traffic

jam, or wear uniform to school. All you need to do is turn on your computer and learn everything in your bedroom. The class is done with skype, video chat or teleconference. All the assignments and discussion are done through online community education tool.

In that condition, what do you think?

Do you like it or not? Why?

The students responded to the project more actively compared to the previous projects. There are some samples of reasons given on why they like online community education tool as follow:

- Discussion in online community education tool is very pleasant. We can do anything in online community education tool like do online test and homework, study together, share our experience and give opinions, chat with other in a different place, and have discussion and socialize. I think that other classes should also use online community education tool, because online community education tool has many benefits and advantages. Online community education tool really helps us to have discussion together about English lesson.
- Discussion in online community education tool is very fascinating. At online community education tool we can learn outside class but conducted as an actual class. We can study together, ask each other, chat with each other, discuss about something, while online in a social media. To be honest, learning with online community education tool is a good way to learn. But sure, every way there are plus aspect and minus aspect. It's good to use online community education tool in our class, but I think not all classes should use online community education tool project, especially in exact class, like math, physics, or the other. Maybe it will be difficult to be discussed.
- I like to have discussion in online community education tool because I can do the assignment or chat with each other or share about everything through relaxing way. It will be nice if other classes join in online community education tool too. They can do everything but not for all of the classes like religion class, it will more complicated to use online community education tool.
- I think it is more fun than learning physics or chemistry in lab. We can learn with online community education tool any time, we can solve our problem here. We can do our English project here with playing game, chatting and other. I think other class should use online community education tool like Bahasa Indonesia, History, Biology, but not for Math, Physics or Chemical. I think we would have difficulty in to discuss it in online community education tool.
- Online community education tool is good application for studying and sharing anything with friends and teacher. But, I agree that online community education tool makes us can't meet face to face. Well, I think we use online community education tool for an assignment. But when we study and practice speaking, I think will be better at class because we can practice it face to face.

Critical Thinking and Online Community Education Tool

The use of online community education tool as educative social media for English learning context as shown in this study brings some positive effects. It leads to the development of critical thinking skills involved in this study which covers projects. It is in line with the finding that social media encourage the mechanism of higher-order reasoning processes (Magolda and Magolda, 2011). In addition, it also requires the kind of focus concentration and persistence necessary for critical thinking as well as intellectual development. In this study the implementation is still in short term so that we can predict that the prolonged use of social media is good for exposing students to repetitive and interactive stimuli that result in changes in the way to learn English language.

Based on the observation done in this study, the students show high motivation to learn English using online media. Basically, utilizing social media is a part of Computer Assisted Language Learning where students are given autonomy to develop their language skills. In this study, the assignments or the projects are given periodically so that it allows the students to have a social network site. In turn it allows users to construct their own private system helpful in developing their English language learning. This finding is also supported by other study that involves similar setting namely English as foreign language (Elam, 2012).

The students gave various reasons on the benefit of using online community education tool. As it is similar to Facebook which allows the administrator to customize the look, the content and the intended assignment, they said that it facilitates English learning. The platform provided in online community education tool allowed students to engage in a wide variety of activities, such as those exposed in the projects given. Students posted poems which can stimulate critical thinking in discussion. They also can do chatting on various issues related with the given theme. The projects also allow other users to comment directly on the topic given. The way students enjoy the learning is similar with other research (Shartika, 2013) that using this tool, students can develop their English language skills independently with a lot of fun.

The eight projects implemented in this study aims at integrating between what students learn in class and what to do to develop their skill outside of the class. During the class session students learn knowledge and elements of the core curriculum. Yet, they also need to apply what they know to solve authentic problems and produce results that matter. The use of online community education tool as digital tools in this study is expected to produce high quality, collaborative products. This is in line with the finding that describes how the project can refocus education on the student which also trains students to empower their passion, empathy, creativity and resiliency (Markham, 2018). These must be activated through experience, not through reading textbooks. Based on the response given by the students in this study, it can be inferred that most of them really enjoyed the project through online community education tool.

Based on the result of the implementation, the projects given show some advantages such as organized around an open-ended driving question or challenge and it creates a

need to know essential content and skills. Further it allows student's voice and choice which requires critical thinking and feedbacks.

Regarding the critical thinking skills as reflected in the students' responses, to some extent the improvement is obvious. It can be seen if we compare the responses from the first project and the last one. The role of CTS in EFL setting can be seen in both reading and writing activities given in the projects of this study. The students show good ability to analyze and to assess source of information in the text given. They can respond the questions well and can make evaluative judgment to other's work.

Learners also develop their critical thinking skills during the writing activities which involved in generating ideas by using exposing their point of view. In doing so, they must employ a range of both cognitive and linguistic skills. Learners are then guided to identify a purpose, to produce ideas and to refine suitable expression (Wade, 1995). The students show a better expression in the final project compared to the first one.

In accomplishing the tasks, all of the students as seen in the finding of this study operate their critical thinking during the eight projects. In this case, they also practiced to process the task environment, which consisted of the assignment and the text produced; and knowledge to be stored in long-term memory. As shown by the result of this study, it goes with the proposition (Flower and Hayes, 1980) in which the student's responses also consisted of topic knowledge, rules for grammar production and knowledge of text standards for online discussion through online community education tool. It will support the enhancement of student's engagement for developing their reading and writing skills through blended learning (Kara, 2018).

CONCLUSION

By using online community education tool, the students show high motivation to learn English through the projects which are given periodically so that it allows the students to have a social network site. In turn it allows users to construct their own private system helpful in developing their English language learning. The students felt at ease to express their critical thinking as the platform provided in online community education tool allowed students to engage in a wide variety of activities, such as those exposed in the projects given. Students posted poems which can stimulate critical thinking in discussion. They also can do chatting on various issues related with the given theme. The projects also allow other users to comment directly on the topic given. It boosts their ability to develop ideas, share information knowledge in the context of online discussion (Koh et al., 2010). The projects aim at integrating between what students learn in class and what to do to develop their skill outside of the class. Using PBL students can take advantage integrating their knowledge on English language into practice. The use of online community education tool as digital tools in this study is expected to produce high quality, collaborative products.

As the study found that the students are enthusiastic to develop their critical thinking through online discussion using online community education tool, the students are

suggested to read more references relevant to their area of interest so that their discussion will be more meaningful. In this case, the more awareness of the language accuracy and fluency is also needed so that they should learn from each other to express themselves through better language use. Since it concerns with the use of online community education tool to develop critical thinking skills, it is suggested that other researchers conduct more elaborative study. More empirical bases on different contexts are needed to strengthen the finding of this study concerning the various computer assisted language program that can be utilized to promote students' critical thinking.

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