Critical learning method in writing class: What do learners think about it?

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Keywords: *critical learning method, English writing class*	*The change of paradigm from "teaching" to "learning': facilitated with critical learning method (CLM) is able to create more meaningful learning environment and experience for university students. However, there might be rejections from teachers, students, or administrators. The current research focuses on students' problems, especially those who joined Writing II class at the English Department of Hasanuddin University. This study was conducted as action research. Two CLM lesson plans were developed and applied in the writing class, and the class interactions were videotaped. The videos were shown to respondents at the end of the semester. Respondents' perceptions were investigated by using free writing and interview techniques. The results revealed that the respondents had positive perception about CLM. However, lecturers need to consider the different levels of learners' proficiency, and to provide relevant reading assignments prior to each session of writing activities.*

1. Introduction

In the last several years, there have been continuous efforts in Hasanuddin University to create a change from "teaching" to "learning" paradigm (Student Centered Learning or SCL). This approach emphasizes the role of learners in learning independently, which creates the possibility for learners to individualize the knowledge they get.

This way of learning very much relates to Critical Thinking (CT) learning method (hence called Critical Learning Method I CLM) CLM puts much emphasis on the ability to think independently and work together, which is also the characteristic of SCL. In reverse, it has been found that SCL can enhance learners' ability to think critically. For example, Quitadamo et al (2009) observed that peer-led team learning (which emphasized the role of learners) influenced critical thinking positively, although not to great extent (Storch, 2019).

Therefore, the change of paradigm from "teaching" to "learning" can be considered as a good initiation to create more meaningful learning environment and experience for university students. However, changes almost always result in problems. There might be rejections from teachers, students, or administrators.

The current research concerns with problems experienced by students, especially students of English Department, Hasanuddin University who joined the class of English Writing II. This study particularly asks two research questions: (1) What do the learners think about the application of CLM in the Writing Class?; and (2) How do the learners think the CLM should be in order to be more suitable with their condition?

2. Literature Review
Essay writing and critical thinking
Two basic parts of an argumentative essay in English pattern are claim and reason. The claim is one's statement showing the author's position in reaction to a problematic issue. The claim should be logically supported with some reasons, and the reasons need to be logically connected to each other too. The reasons can be found when learners are able to make logical connection between the problem and various aspects of life they see in the reality, and this can be done only when learners can think critically.

The role of critical thinking in writing is very obvious especially in the argumentative writing. An argumentative essay is intended for proposing a claim and proving that the claim is justifiable based on some reasons (Kabilan, 2000). For this purpose, a writer needs the ability to identify problems, locate the causes of the problems, and formulate solutions.

With this explanation, the writers believe that a good essay is a product of one's good ability in thinking critically (Bean & Melzer, 2021). The thinking process might have happened before the process of writing itself, so that essays might be regarded as products of people's ability in making a decision of what they believe as the truth. This is in line with Ka bi Ian's (2000) opinion that language proficiency can be obtained only when students are able think creatively and critically, in addition to their ability to use the language and understand the meaning.

Critical learning method
Critical learning method has emphasized the use of collaborative learning as a beneficial method in enhancing students' critical thinking. Although each learner might be able to think independently, discussing ideas with other learners are more likely to result in more comprehensive view of a phenomenon. Other people's comments, questions, and criticisms will be very good stimulation for writers to rethink about their own thinking until they can obtain the best understanding of a problem.

The benefit of collaborative learning in sharpening students' critical thinking has been concluded in a study by Gokhale (1995). He says that critical thinking can be developed when learners learn together because in such process, they have the opportunity to discuss, clarify, and evaluate what all group members think.

In relation to the application of critical thinking in classes, Kabilan (2000) argues that teachers need to change what they think about learners, teaching method, and their role as teachers. Kabilan says that in CT classes, learning may happen in a reciprocal way - "the learners learn from the teacher, and the teacher learns from the learners". In addition, Kabilan emphasizes that "pedagogy of answers" dominated by answers and solutions from teachers should be avoided.

3. Research Methodology

This study was conducted as action research, which is a combination of actual activities deliberately intended to make improvement in certain aspects, and research effort intended to understand the process being conducted (Dick 1993). Two CLM lesson plans were developed and applied in a writing class. The learning activities were recorded, and the videos were shown to student respondents at the end of the semester. Respondents' perceptions were investigated by using free writing and interview techniques.

4. Findings

The findings reveal that the respondents held a generally positive perception of the learning method, especially due to its interactive and engaging nature. Through both free writing and interviews, the participants expressed that the method effectively encouraged them to think critically and engage in the tasks assigned by the lecturer. One of the key aspects that motivated them was the involvement in discussions, which were an integral part of the learning process. These discussions were not only a means for exchanging ideas but also acted as a motivational tool, helping students to stay actively engaged and focused on the learning objectives.

The respondents particularly highlighted discussions as the most impressive and influential aspect of the method. During these discussions, they were tasked with answering questions related to essay writing or collaboratively composing essays on assigned topics. This approach not only fostered a sense of collective effort but also provided an opportunity for deeper understanding and exploration of the subject matter. The collaborative nature of these discussions seemed to facilitate a more dynamic and participatory learning environment, where students could learn from each other's insights and ideas.

However, a potential weakness identified in the method was the risk of some students relying too heavily on their peers to complete the assigned tasks. In group settings, certain individuals might not contribute actively, choosing instead to lean on others for answers or solutions. This behaviour could undermine the intended outcomes of the method, particularly in terms of individual learning and accountability.

Fortunately, the research findings suggest that this issue was mitigated through the lecturer's continuous observation and monitoring of group activities. The lecturer's active involvement allowed for early identification of students who were not participating fully in the group tasks. To encourage greater individual contribution, the lecturer implemented a system of extra scoring for active participants, which helped to motivate students to engage more thoroughly in the discussions and group work. This extra incentive appeared to address the issue of unequal participation and ensured that students were held accountable for their own learning.

In summary, the method was largely successful in stimulating active learning and critical thinking, with discussions playing a central role in this process. Although the risk of passive participation remained, the lecturer's strategies for monitoring and incentivizing individual contribution helped to mitigate this challenge, ensuring a more effective and balanced learning experience for all students.

5. Discussion

The respondents' reflections reveal that this method has given positive impacts on the learners in three aspects of learning: cognitive (understanding the material), affective (ability

to participate in team work), and psychomotor (English skills). Learners were helped to understand the material through the multilayer discussions applied in the class. The affective domain was developed when learners worked together in discussions. They were trained to work in team to agree on one solution. The activities in groups stimulated all English skills simultaneously: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In this way the method contributed to the improvement of the learners' psychomotor skill.

One criticism on this method is that it could give pressure on learners. However, respondents' answers revealed that it was not the case in their class. They acknowledged that they did not feel tensed because the lecturer was not strict, although firmed and discipline.

Finally, it seems that not many things to be adjusted in this method. Almost all respondents said that the method was already good. However, lecturer needs to communicate more with students, especially with shy students and slow learners. This can be done, for example, by giving optional reading assignment before the discussion activity, so that students have the opportunity to preview the material or find other supporting resources that can help them to have ideas to share in discussions.

6. Conclusion

Back to the questions at the beginning of this study, it can be concluded that learners in this study thought positively about this method. However, it will be very helpful if the lecturer can consider learners' different level of ability/proficiency, and provide reading assignments relevant to the writing activities.

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