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EFL Pre-Service Teacher Constructs and Practices of Critical Thinking

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Abstract

Most studies on critical thinking involving preservice teachers (PST) focused on their perception about critical thinking and learning activities, how to improve critical thinking skills through various learning methods, techniques, and strategies in the classroom, and classroom teacher-learner interaction to facilitate critical thinking activities. Irrespective of the existing studies conducted on critical thinking in the classroom, it is still an important issue for PSTs in especially investigating how the construct of critical thinking defined by the PSTs is translated into learning objectives as the learning objectives become the foundation in designing learning activities. This study was, therefore, conducted to explore both the preservice teachers' construct of critical thinking and how the construct is translated into learning objectives in their lesson plans. This current study adopted a case study model emphasizing on the occurrence of cases in the field for the sake of seeking answers to those cases. The respondents of this study were six PSTs conducting their practice teaching at vocational and senior high school for three months. Data collected consist of two types, namely: data from written interview about construct of PSTs' critical thinking and data dealing with critical thinking practices in a form of design of learning activities collected from lesson plans. Findings show that the respondents are able to define what critical thinking is based on the keywords signifying what critical thinking is. However, crosscheck on how the construct is transferred into the learning objectives set in the lesson plan does not show encouraging results.

Keywords: analysis; synthesis; evaluation; construct; preservice

Introduction

National curriculum released in 2013 for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching in high school in Indonesia requires EFL pre-service teachers to teach on the basis of genre-based teaching. The concept of genre-based teaching since then gained much attention among Indonesian EFL teachers. Moreover, genre or text is the most familiar word spoken by EFL teachers. Not a single lesson plan escapes this word. The curriculum developed seems to be so convincing to achieve the national goal of teaching EFL as most studies on genre-based teaching show conclusive positive results.

Scientifically, studies supporting the use of genre-based teaching suggest positive results on learners' ability in producing texts. A study by Flowerdew (2019) reports that by analyzing multiple texts of research articles, a respondent is able to identify features useful for writing scientific text such as authorial voice, arguments, and stance. Additionally, a study by Emilia and Hamid (2015) points out that learning activities designed on the basis of Systemic Functional Linguistics-Genre Pedagogy (SFL-PG) are able to improve the students' writing ability in terms of selecting appropriate linguistic features and organizing ideas. In a similar vein with Flowerdew, challenged with unfamiliar genre, a game, an instructor is able to create a poetic effect on which critical reading can be initiated (Mitchell, Sim, & Liting, 2017).

Furthermore, irrespective of failure to show influence of genre in types of writing statistically, Xiaojun (2022) speculates that genre knowledge may influence the quality of writings produced by students. In a relative more positive result is shown in a study conducted by (Truong, 2017). The result of the study correspondingly supports the previous studies as the approach can benefit students in writing in terms of increasing awareness and understanding of the features of text developed.

Studies also show that the use of genre-based teaching also show encouraging results as in literacy and listening classes. Wilhelm (2016) reports that respondents given free reading of various genres can experience five different pleasures one of which is intellectual pleasure. Use of genre-based teaching to improve listening skill is revealed by (Khatibi & Barjesteh, 2017). They conclude that students taught with genre-based teaching to increase their awareness to the listening task assigned can improve their listening proficiency.

In relation to pre-service teachers' (PST) analysis of various genres, a study by Godley, Reaser, and Moore (2015) indicate that PSTs are able to engage consciously, think alternatively, inquire actively, and reflectively evaluate issues or questions about critical language awareness, such as use of language as the basis of making judgement to others. In contrary to the previous study, a study on use of genre-based teaching by PST conducted by Nurlaelawati and Novianti (2017) in Indonesian context finds that there was a gap between the theory understood and its implementation. Additionally, they also found that theoretically PSTs investigated did not thoroughly understand the principles of genre-based teaching.

Prior to mastering the principles of genre-based teaching, we suspect that the existing gap in implementing genre-based teaching in the classroom by PST, as

revealed by Nurlaelawati and Novianti (2017) is due to their incomplete construct and incomprehensive practices of critical thinking. To be able to implement genre-based teaching, one of the main principles to be mastered is understanding how target language is conventionally performed to state meaning (Hayland, 2019). In relation to genre, understanding the target language involves the ability to understand texts. This understanding is facilitated by critical thinking: analyzing and evaluating language features from the text before being able to create a new piece of text. As the nature of the genre is discursive, no single similar meaning applies to the same genre in different discourse. A particular text produced in a particular discourse will constitute different meaning to the same text produced in another discourse. It is in the name of discourse that critical thinking plays its role during the process of substantiating a text. This is more significant than just simply analyzing text structure in the classroom for the sake of being able to produce the same text in the target language, English.

The main question to be addressed to preservice teachers prior to implementing the genre-based teaching is whether they have the minimum precondition to implement the genre-based teaching. The precondition itself is the ability to conceptualize a construct of critical thinking and then implement the construct in the classroom as part of the teaching activity. Being unable to fulfil this precondition will fail the PSTs in implementing the genre-based teaching method. The PSTs will end up at teaching genre mechanically as simple as identifying the structure of text and its language aspects by simply forgetting the discourse where the genre is published.

To think critically, one should be able to analyze and evaluate a piece of information (Shaheen, 2016), synthesizing and interpreting the information as well as considering assumptions (Te-Lien , Jia-Jia, & Chin-Chung , 2018). Such information evaluation is preceded by skeptical thinking (Nolder & Kadous, 2018) by questioning to new information (Bacon, 2017). This critical thinking is an act of interpreting a text (Bobkina & Stefanova, 2016). Nolder and Kadous (2018) also argue that critical thinking also deals with the making of judgement of information received. These cognitive activities are organized into systematic and logical thinking (Byerly, 2019).

Some argue that critical thinking is culture-bound. This idea suggests that the activity of reading and writing becomes social practices. As this critical thinking is a matter of social practices, teaching critical thinking skills require an ongoing process

especially when reading and writing activities are not part of a particular society's valued activity.

Literacy practices mainly manifest in forms of reading and writing primarily dealing with texts. Texts can be in forms of verbal, written, or symbol. A text needs to be deciphered to be able to get its meaning and to be able to write another text; Information from the previous text should be synthesized to form a newly created text.

Deciphering a text requires its readers to involve critical cognitive activities. These activities are initiated by identifying specific information, summarizing, analyzing, synthesizing, and presenting opinions on ideas contained in the text (Karakoç, Ruegg, & Gu, 2022), thereby building schemata through assimilation of new information in the text and the readers knowledge (Yanmei, 2015). Additionally, Yanmei argues that both reading activities require students' critical thinking about ideas presented in a text. This means that critical thinking facilitates readers in substantiating information a text conveys. Moreover, Lupo, Strong, Lewis, Walpole, and McKenna (2017) conclude that reading activity demands readers to identify reading purposes, background knowledge activation, attending to main ideas, evaluating information critically, comprehension monitoring, and inferences drawing. Irrespective of the increase of cognitive achievement, extensive type of reading helps nurture readers feeling of enjoyment which positively affect their reading attitude (Park, 2020).

Writing, on the other hand, can be done only if enough information is possessed through reading texts. Wallace and Wray (2021) argue that writing requires extensive and critical reading. Through reading, a new text can be produced. Of this, Wilson-Lopez, Strong, and Sia (2017) argue that reading should involve perception of criticality, interpretation, and rewriting a text which has been read. This means that writing has to be preceded by critical reading.

Further, literacy practices are categorized based on its cognitive level of activities by Wells (1987) into 4 dimensions, namely: performative, functional, informational, and epistemic. Among the four dimensions, the last dimension demands higher critical cognitive activities positioning an individual to enable him to utilize knowledge and experience, and transform them into new knowledge. Similarly, Zyngier and Fialho (2010) identify level of literacy practices into four. They are reaction, awareness, substantiate, and creation. The last two levels: substantiate and creation,

require a reader to be able to make new meanings and thus in turn use the meanings to create a new piece of text.

Literacy practices in forms of reading and writing activities require critical thinking skills. Practically, reading a particular genre to be fruitful should involve at least analyzing the content through its use of language features, assimilating the new information with the old, and creating information from the reading through writing a new piece of information. Thus, a teacher should be familiar with these critical practices prior to implementing genre-based teaching. She has to be a role model for her students. This model can be automatically performed when she has experienced reading and writing with various genres accompanied by practices of critical awareness.

Studies on critical thinking in EFL are mostly focused on verifying that critical thinking can be enhanced through techniques and methods of teaching. A study focusing on developing critical thinking skills through argumentative writing was conducted by Widyastuti (2018). She finds that in line with the quality of the arguments, the students need to practice more in developing arguments to practice their critical thinking skills. Similar findings are also identified by Arifin (2020). Facilitated by critical reading, the study has the objective to develop the students' critical thinking. The results show that the students failed in two major parts, namely: generating conclusion and expressing opinions. The author claims that the students' lack of English mastery becomes the major contributor to the failure. Additionally, by using HOTS-based reading assessment, Damaianti, Abidin, and Rahma (2020) are successful to identify that the critical thinking skills of the students assessed were on the domain of low cognitive level: Knowledge. The students could only identify and remember factual information.

On the contrary, Zamzam (2016) shows opposing results to the previous studies. She finds that a problem-based learning method enabled university students to develop their skills in terms of identifying and analyzing problem, find a solution, critically question and criticize ideas from other groups, answer questions, and share ideas. Irrespective of the findings, she argues that critical thinking skills should be practiced regularly as part of a life skill. Another similar result was found by Halimah, Sumiyadi, Mulyati, and Damaianti (2020). By focusing on critical literacy approach to teaching literary, the study finds that the students were able to improve their critical thinking skills and critical awareness. Likewise, a study on reading by Prasasti (2020)

finds that the respondents interpreted the metaphors by reflectively linking them with their own life experiences and background knowledge. Further, the respondents were able to substantiate the metaphors using various viewpoints. However, it should be noted that the last three studies involved university students as the respondents. With longer experiences of learning and practices of critical thinking skills, it is possible that the university students can perform critical thinking skills better than high school students.

Irrespective of the inconclusive findings above, pre-service teachers' mastery of critical thinking still becomes a major issue in teaching. Studies on preservice teachers' critical thinking disposition showed that one subdimension of the disposition, truth seeking skill score was low (Palavan, 2020). This subdimension is characterised by skill to deliver critical questions when prompted with new information. Additionally, Yuan and Stapleton (2019) identify that the preservice teachers' understanding of critical thinking are poor. Similar finding is also found by Yasir and Alnoori (2020) and Haberlin (2018). Their study reveals that a limited definition of critical thinking is constructed by preservice teachers. The keywords characterizing critical thinking identified were logical reasoning, thinking, analyzing, and evaluating. In contrast to those previous studies, Dashtestani (2022) finds that facilitated by technology, preservice teachers believed to be able to develop their critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Likewise, Bognar and Krumes (2017) find that through reflective practices preservice teachers were able to practice their deep thinking especially in analyzing and evaluating their teaching practices by considering multiple perspectives. Furthermore, Yilmaz-Na and Sönmez (2022) report that there is modest improvement of preservice teachers' critical thinking skills in evaluating ill-defined problems.

Previous studies on pre-service teachers' mastery of critical thinking are limited to explore the perception of preservice teachers dealing with critical thinking and reflection on critical thinking performed after being involved in a particular learning activity. This study is conducted to investigate how critical thinking constructed by preservice teachers is transferred into the learning design. The results of this study significantly contribute to the understanding of what is perceived and how the perception about critical thinking is implemented in the classroom. At last, this study provides a picture of preservice teachers' construct of critical thinking, within their perceptions and practices.

In the light of the existing problem above, therefore, this current study is conducted to answer specifically two research questions, namely: 1) How does the respondent define critical thinking?; 2) How is the construct of critical thinking transferred into learning objectives set in the lesson plan?. The results of this study are expected to provide a picture of perceived critical thinking and its implementation by PST at school.

Research Methodology

This is a case study in particular involving EFL pre-service teachers doing their practice teaching at school. The main purpose of this study is not to seek for a generalization, but to explore how critical thinking is implemented in the classroom by PSTs based on their construct of critical thinking. As genre-based teaching is recommended by the curriculum in use, critical thinking should underlie any activity dealing with genre involved in the classroom. PSTs failure to put this critical thinking into action will potentially fail the genre-based teaching.

Respondents

Six pre-service teachers, under our supervision, agreed to participate in this study. Their age ranged from 21 to 23. In the data analysis, their initials were coded as Win, Sud, Hea, Dim, Mel, and Tiy. They were all majoring in English language teaching (ELT). At the time of doing practice teaching, all the respondents were in their 7th semester. During practice teaching, these respondents were deployed to 2 different high schools; one group was deployed to a vocational high school and the other was assigned to a senior high school. They were deployed for three months with an introduction phase in week 1 and guided teaching in week 2. They taught independently for the rest of the weeks. Yet they still had to consult their supervisor for the lesson plan prepared for teaching.

Data Collection

There were two sources of data. The first source of data was in a form of a written interview collected using google form. This sort of data was to find out the

construct of critical thinking contrived by the respondents. The second one came from lesson plans written by the respondents. The lesson plans collected were those from week 2 in the phase of guided teaching. In this phase the teaching done by the respondents were supervised by a teacher mentor. Data collected in this phase, which were in the forms of the teaching documents, were to identify how the construct of critical thinking is practiced to support genre-based teaching. The main focus of the document analysis was on how objectives of learning were set in the lesson plan.

Data Analysis

There were two types of data collected. The first data dealing with the respondents' construct of critical thinking were analyzed based on recurring themes identified. To check whether there were some elements of criticality in the construct, the last three cognitive activities in the revised Bloom's taxonomy namely: analyzing, evaluating, and creating information (Cargas, Williams, & Rosenberg, 2017) were used as benchmark. Additionally, attention was also given to keywords closely related to those three cognitive activities characterizing either critical awareness, such as: skepticism (Nolder & Kadous, 2018); or techniques to elicit critical thinking, such as: questioning (Bacon, 2017).

The second type of data was analyzed on the basis of how the construct of critical thinking was transferred into the learning objectives set in the lesson plan designed by the respondents. The consistency of the construct of critical thinking developed by the respondents was crosschecked with how the construct was implemented in the lesson plan. Use of operational verbs under HOTS (analysis, evaluation, and creation) based on the revised Bloom's taxonomy (Krathwohl, 2002) became a reference that the lesson plan was likely designed on the basis of critical thinking.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

Findings are presented into two subcategories in accordance to the objective of the study: to explore the construct of PSTs' critical thinking and how the construct is translated into practice in a form of learning objectives.

Constructs of Critical Thinking

Results of analysis on construct of critical thinking show some keywords in definitions collected from the respondents. Those keywords identified are systematic and logical thinking; analysis; skepticism; questioning; observing; assessing and evaluating; being curious; and quick response. Some of the keywords identified become features of critical thinking identified from existing body of literature. More detailed key words identified are presented in the following.

'Systematic and logical thinking', and 'analysis' are three keywords identified in a definition of critical thinking by three respondents: Win, Sud, and Hea. One of which is presented in the following transcript.

> Concept of critical thinking is definable as an ability to think correctly, systematically, and logically in understanding a problem. It is also an ability to respond quickly to a particular problem through analysis. (Transcript 1)

The definition above covers such keywords as 'systematic and logical thinking' (Browne & Freeman, 2000), and 'analysis' (Siegel, 1989). Additionally, another feature of critical thinking emerges in this definition is ability to respond quickly to a problem.

Other themes emerging in the definition of critical thinking are being 'sceptical' and 'questioning' information. Through a description of what a friend was doing when prompted with new information, Transcript 2 shows these themes.

> My friend is not easy to accept an explanation. He has to crosscheck the explanation from, for example books, he reads. When doing my presentation in class, he addresses several critical questions. He stops questioning when he understands my explanations. (Transcript 2)

Definition from transcript 2 shows that crosschecking information from various sources is a form of sceptical thinking (Nolder & Kadous, 2018). Being sceptical means to question a fact or information about its validity (Bacon, 2017). Therefore, questioning to information is the step should be taken prior to making judgement about the information received.

Performing evaluation to information and making judgement are some other themes identified in the data. The two themes are presented in the following transcript taken from a definition of critical thinking defined by Dim.

> Construct of critical thinking, as far as I know, is to initiate an evaluation on information received before being able to conclude [whether or not the

> information is true] on the basis of some considerations: such as evaluation and logical reasoning. (Transcript 3)

Definition of critical thinking in Transcript 3 involves some aspect of evaluating information as proposed by Duron, Limbach, and Waugh (2006). The definition also involves making judgment (Nolder & Kadous, 2018) of the information received after performing some evaluation.

Practices of Critical Thinking

Results of teaching documents analysis show that there are some fundamental problems faced by preservice teachers in relation to implementing critical thinking in the learning design, especially with setting the learning objectives. The problems are grouped into three, namely: mixed of LOTS and HOTS of thinking levels in the learning objectives, order of domain priority, and use of non-operational verbs.

Mixed of LOTS and HOTS

To enable learners to achieve language competence, selection of learning objectives should be focused on HOTS in the Bloom's domain of thinking. Analysis of learning objectives set in the lesson plan, however, reveals that levels of thinking in LOTS still mixes with those in HOTS. Four different lesson plans from four preservice teachers show this case. The following are learning objectives showing a mixture of LOTS and HOTS.

1. To identify the social functions …
2. To write a short and simple text either oral or written … (Win, Lesson Plan 1)

The transcript also shows that there is quite a wide gap between one level of thinking and the other one as shown in the following. The mixing of operational verb selection 'to identify' (C1; Remembering) with 'to write' (C6; Creating) indicates a wide gap of cognitive domain from 'remembering' to 'creating'. This shows that the respondent is unable to figure out which cognitive activities demand more critical thinking skills. When these learning objectives are followed, there will be confusion in the learning activity design of how to facilitate learners to be able to produce a text while the learning activities are limited within the 'remembering' domain.

Order of cognitive domain priority

Besides the existing wide gap between cognitive domains used in the learning objectives, another problem identified is the order of domain priority. Bloomfield theorises that cognitive activities are ordered from the lowest level demanding least cognitive skills to the highest demanding the highest level of cognitive skills. In setting the learning objectives, this order should be taken into consideration. In reality, however, there are two different lesson plans designed by two preservice teachers which disobey the rule, one of which is shown in the following transcript.

1. After reading and presenting the material, learners are able to analyze the social functions, text structure ….
2. Learners are able to apply appropriate expressions ….
3. Learners are able to communicate in English contextually. (Dim, Lesson Plan 1)

The learning objective number one, 'to analyze', belongs to C4 (Analyzing) while 'to apply' in the objective number two belongs to C3 (Applying). This order shows that the learning objectives are incorrectly set up as the objective from C3 should precede C4. Furthermore, the verb 'to apply' should be specifically operationalized to be able to answer the question 'What type of application?' to enable the teacher to design specific evaluation and to be able to scaffold the next learning objective.

Use of non-operational verbs

Another important finding dealing with how critical thinking is implemented in the learning objectives is the use of non-operational verbs in the lesson plan. The rule in setting a learning objective is to use an operational verb as it is prescribed under each cognitive domain. Yet, the lesson plans analyzed reveal that learning objectives are still set using non-operational verbs as the following script shows.

1. Learners are able to understand social functions, structure of the texts, ….
2. Learners are able to write a written text about giving and responding to …. (Tiy, Lesson Plan 1)

This use of non-operational verb, 'to understand', potentially constraints the teacher in both designing and evaluating the learning. The use of 'to understand' (C2; Understanding) can be made operational by selecting one operational verb from the list of operational verbs under this domain, such as: 'to present' or 'to explain'. In addition, the gap between learning objective number one and number two is so

wide. The gap can be reduced by increasing the level of cognitive activity of learning objective number two within the domain of C4 (Analyzing). There is likely possibility the lesson plan designed will deviate widely in its classroom implementation.

Discussion

The findings on construct of critical thinking, though not comprehensively defined, has shown some key components important for critical thinking to be performed. Such key components as analysing and evaluating information, sceptically questioning to information, and making judgement are identified in the definition. Irrespective of the absence of personal disposition, the minimal set of skills required to think critically appears in each of the definition, namely: analysing and evaluating information (Paul & Elder, 2008).

On the contrary to the construct of critical thinking developed by the respondents, the implementation of the critical thinking construct in the learning objectives set by the respondents in their lesson plans is poor. The learning objectives set do not show the transfer of the construct. In most cases, the respondents fail to set learning objectives which are intended to practice the learners' critical thinking. The cognitive domain in which critical thinking can be practiced should be within C4, C5, and C6. These domains are categorised as higher order thinking skills (HOTS). The question remains to be answered is 'Why do the respondents fail to transfer the construct of critical thinking into the learning design?'

The first possible reason due to this failure may have to do with critical thinking practices the respondents do during learning activities taking place on campus. They understand critical thinking theoretically but they are seldom practicing the critical thinking activities. They fail to translate the construct of critical thinking into critical thinking disposition. Zhengwei, Chaoqun, Meng, and Fangzhou (2017)as well as Yuan and Stapleton (2019) argue that students need to have enough training and modelling from the teacher in terms of questioning, analysing, discussing and solving problems before being able to practice critical thinking; and they should engage with critical thinking as on-going practices before the critical thinking practices become a life skill (Karakoç, Ruegg, & Gu, 2022). This means that the normal school holds the responsibility to design comprehensive critical thinking-based learning activities involving all courses to guarantee the activities are sustainably carried out in the classroom.

Moreover, the respondents' lack of understanding on Bloom Taxonomy has the stake to this failure. They do not have enough knowledge to be able to differentiate operational versus non-operational verbs which can be used in setting a learning objective. Even worse, they also seem, we suspect, to be unable to relate Bloom taxonomy with critical thinking, thus failing them to design HOTS-based learning objectives. Additionally, critical thinking does not become valued norms that inhabit the preservice teachers' daily routines. This is particularly true when the society has different adopted values about critical thinking (Shaheen, 2016) or even worse when adopted values in the society inhibit practices of critical thinking such as shame of making mistakes in class (Qing & Xuesong, 2016).

Finally, the objectives set in the lesson plan show that the learning design is more product-oriented than process-oriented. While critical thinking weighs heavily on the process, such as analysing and evaluating information, all lesson plans documented in this study emphasize the ability to produce a text. These lesson plans have one in common: to enable the students to produce a text. Yet, in achieving this objective, it is not supported by process-based learning activities by which students can experience critical thinking activities, such as analysing use of meaningful expressions in their context as well critically giving meaning to the type of text presented in the classroom.

Conclusion and Suggestion

The study is conducted to answer two research questions. The first research question is 'How does the respondent define critical thinking?'. A written interview was conducted to collect data about the construct of critical thinking defined by the respondents. The second research question 'How is the construct of critical thinking transferred into learning objectives set in the lesson plan?' was answered by way of analyzing document in a form of a lesson plan.

Findings on construct of critical thinking reveal that the respondents include key components of critical thinking in their construct, namely: analysis, evaluation, and questioning as a form of skeptical. Most definitions identified include analysis and evaluation as the key components of critical thinking. In relation to the second research question, however, the respondents have problems in transferring the construct into its implementation. The problems are markedly observed in three areas:

mixture of LOTS and HOTS, order of cognitive domain priority, and use of non-operational verbs.

The findings also show that the respondents fail to design process-based learning activity which becomes the characteristic of critical thinking. They emphasize the learning more on the product the students are able to make. While the product may become proof of learning activity, it does not necessarily guarantee that the learning itself takes place as it is planned. There is possibility the product is a result of copying from the model provided by the respondent.

That PSTSs are struggling to set learning objectives in their lesson plan is alarming. Designing learning by initially setting a learning goal should be the basic competence a PST has to master completely. This shows that more practices should be designed for PSTs to be able to link the relation of critical thinking with Bloom taxonomy on the one hand and designing learning on the basis of HOTS which is initiated from setting HOTS-based learning objectives on the other.

It is suggested that practices of critical thinking activity become daily learning activity in all courses offered to PSTs prior to enroll to the teaching practice programme at school. PSTs should well master this skill before standing in front of the classroom teaching their students.

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