



CRITICAL THINKING ASPECT OF SUCCESSFUL ENGLISH LEARNERS IN THE 21ST CENTURY AT SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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abstract

The learners' skills of communication, collaboration, creative and critical thinking, information literacy, media literacy, technology literacy, leadership, initiative, productivity, social skill, and flexibility are the important requirements in this 21st century. Those skills can be developed through learning a foreign language. A successful language learner covers several characteristics, which quite similar to the characteristics of a bilingual or multilingual. A lot of research had explored the characteristics of a successful language learner without specifying the skills involved. The aim of this research is to analyze the profile of successful English learners on their critical thinking aspect. This research method is qualitative and the data is collected through interview for both teacher and learners. The result shows that successful learners are commonly reached the standard of good critical thinking based on the theory adapted, by reasoning effectively, thinking systematically, decide and judge, and solve the problem.

INTRODUCTION

Societies, or individual at specific, affected much by globalization. The changes of globalization which leads to a developing technology also shape the environment of education, and English as an international language is strictly related to the term of globalization (Dewi, 2013). The wide differences in environment caused by globalization direct both teacher and school to use the standard for students.

Believe as the important key to get a better-paying and more precious job, several skills are set as the standard, since research had proven that having limited skills in numeracy and literacy heavily limits the access for those precious jobs (Schleicher, 2015). Besides, Boholano (2017) stated that learning in the recent era highlights globalization and internationalization. The more extensive scope of learning students involved, the more extensive challenge will face. Therefore, several requirement skills are playing an important role in policy-making since those skills are seen as the essential section for their future career or education (Soland, Hamilton, & Stecher, 2013).

The skills mentioned are claimed as the skills of 21st century, specifically in industry 4.0 in which students are much related to the development of technology. Schools, involving teachers, require students to master several skills, besides their academic achievement. They are skills of communicating, collaborating, creative and critical thinking, information literacy,

media literacy, technology literacy, leadership, initiative, productivity, social skill and flexibility. Those skills can be developed through learning a foreign language.

Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture has adapted three concepts of 21st Century Learning to develop the curriculum of Elementary School, Junior High School, Senior High School and Vocational High School. Three concepts mentioned before were 21st Century Skills (Trilling & Fadel, 2009), Scientific Approach and Authentic Learning & Authentic Assessment.

The concept of 21st Century Skills by Trilling and Fadel will be deeply explored by this research. As stated on their book, they categorized the 21st Century Skills in three points; learning and innovation skills (critical thinking and problem solving, communications and collaboration, creativity and innovation), digital literacy skills (information literacy, media literacy, information and communication technologies), career and life skills (flexibility and adaptability, initiative and self-direction, social and cross-cultural interaction, productivity and accountability, leadership and responsibility). The Partnership for 21st Century Skills presents the 4Cs of communication, collaboration, creativity and critical thinking as the main skills of learning and innovation in the 21st century (Erdogan, 2019).

ELL (English language learner) defined as an individual who is in the progression of dynamically learning English (Bardack, 2010). They are also whose primary language is not English, meaning that they learn English as a foreign language. The English language learners gain a lot of program to improve academic performance in English due to the trials with reading, speaking, and/or writing skills in English. Other terms that are commonly used to refer to ELLs are language minority students, English as a Second Language (ESL) students, culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students, and limited English proficient (LEP) students.

This study focused on exploring successful English language learners. However, since the research of successful learners was conducted by many researchers without specifying their skills before, this research explored deeper, specifically on their critical thinking.

Reeves (2012) brings an elaboration upon three main characteristics of a successful learner; those who becomes improvingly autonomous, motivated by her/his own goal and reflect it in his/her self-improvement, and ready to be adaptable in learning different contexts and respond the change's requirement properly.

Moreover, he stated that there is no clear rigid point upon characteristics of a successful learner. There is also the theme of social interaction and collaboration. On the other side, the specific qualification by the document of A Curriculum for Excellence (Scottish Executive, 2004 p.12) states that the design of curriculum should have the objectives to produce 'successful learners who are capable to; practice the literacy, communication and numeracy skills, be aware of ICT, think independently and in a creative way, work in a group and individually, evaluate with a good reason, use different kinds of learning in a differ situations. Besides, there are also some additional points on their motivation and enthusiast for learning, goals for an excellent achievement, and open-minded to any ideas.

Certain studies of successful learners and the effect have done by Asma (2016). This research was aimed at evaluating how effective English learning is. The different reaction of learners found in their feeling of anxiety. The result shows the different reaction of learners

on their anxiety, the open-minded personality and the way they think before and after learning English.

On the other side, one of the studies concerning the cognitive aspects of successful English language learners since they are claimed as bilinguals had done by Robert, “successful foreign language learning is gained by the process of overlapping the areas of brain” (Robert, 2017). One of the areas deals with cognitive functioning (Abutalebi & Green, 2008). Cognitive functioning deals with the symbolic operation such as perception, memory, and creation of imagination or thinking. Therefore, those who have high level of language acquisition also have a high level of cognitive control and show an enhancement in their cognitive duty.

Another research had proven that this new foundation of 21st century learning increases motivation and improves learning outcomes, as it involves critical thinking, creativity and problem solving into the content of knowledge (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Critical thinking and problem-solving skills are easy to be trained through many inquiry and problem-solving activities and programs. They are effectively developed by a learning projects that involved questions and problem.

Upon these skills, students are expected to be able to;

1. Give an effective reason, by involving different reasoning types considering the situation.
2. Think systemically, producing a complex system of outcomes by analyzing the parts of an interaction.
3. Decide and judge, by analyzing and evaluating thoughts or facts, evaluating the alternative point of view, relating the information and arguments, writing the conclusion, then reflecting it through the learning activity.
4. Solve the problem, by showing the alternative solution and questioning something which leads into a solution.

This research highlights the term of 21st century skills based on the status quo. 21st century era requires the learners to have various skills, including skills of communication, collaboration, creative and critical thinking, information literacy, media literacy, technology literacy, leadership, initiative, productivity, social skill and flexibility. Those skills categorized the learners into the successful ones when most of them are fully covered.

Considering the skills of successful language learners will cover a wide discussion, the main objective of this research is to explore their critical thinking as the main point. The researcher specified the discussion to the aspect of critical thinking provided by Trilling & Fadel (2009) which was appropriate with the concept of 21st century skills nowadays.

METHOD

This research is descriptive qualitative. According to Creswell, qualitative research means exploring and understanding the meaning of individuals or groups to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2012). The subjects of this research were English learners of Senior High School in Cirebon city as well as their English teacher. SMAN 2 Cirebon was chosen for several reasons; it was categorized as one of the favorite schools in Cirebon city based on the data from Puspendik Kemdikbud (Education Assessment Center by the Ministry of Education and Culture) 2019. SMAN 2 Cirebon is the second-best public Senior High School in Cirebon

(Badrun, 2019). The other reason was that the school has a great achievement on a lot of English competitions, as stated in their official website (sman2cirebon.sch.id), they have won a lot of English Competition. One of them is the competition held by UGJ (Universitas Gunung Jati) Cirebon in 2019. SMAN 2 Cirebon become the champion as they win the newscasters, speech, mini drama and debate competition. Since the main objective of this research is to analyze the aspects of successful learners, the researcher believes choosing this school would be the best decision. The research was not conducted for all the students of SMAN 2 Cirebon, and only 10 selected students were being analyzed as the representative.

The research process covers developing questions and procedures, data was commonly collected in the participant's setting, data analysis gained from particulars to general themes, and the researcher interprets the meaning of the data. The final written report has a flexible structure. Besides, the researcher used primary source and secondary source (Sugiyono, 2013. P. 308). By the primary source, the data given is originally gained / it consist a valid research conducted by the researcher itself. Meanwhile by the secondary source, the data is given to the third-person, or given by the media. A review of some research, for instance, is the type of secondary data since it was not originally made by the one who published. Or the publisher is not the truly researcher who gained the data. Another example of secondary source is notes, picture, videos or any other recording sources which support the existing primary data (Siyoto & Sodik, 2015).

Furthermore, several steps are used in conducting the research (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012). Those steps cover; identifying the particular phenomenon to be analyzed, identifying the participants, generating the hypothesis, collecting the data, analyzing the data, interpreting the data and building a conclusion.

Document analysis and interviews were chosen as the tools for gaining the information / the data. Document analysis is an essential tool of research which categorized as a social-research method. It also claimed as the important part of triangulation schemes (Bowen, 2009).

The data of students' exposition essay were analyzed comparing to the criteria used. Then the interview section for teachers confirmed the result of data analysis. Transcription is used to collect the data of the interview, as it is the process of converting audiotape recordings or field notes into text data. Then it was arranged as the result of the research.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As one of the essential skills in 21st century, the topic of critical thinking is widely discussed. This research revealed how the actual skill of critical thinking is, precisely the real existence on the profile of successful learners. As the previous discussion about the concept of 21st-century skills stated, critical thinking is one of the skills required. Furthermore, as the requirements skills, students are expected to have several characteristics.

Successful learners' critical thinking can be viewed through several aspects. Those aspects cover their capability in using various type of reasoning (such as deductive or inductive reasoning), thinking systematically, analysing the interaction between each part of thought / ideas, writing the conclusion & reflect it through the learning activity, and solving different kinds of problem through different ways.

Various Type of Reasoning

The research conducted revealed the use of inductive and deductive reasoning by the participants. As deductive reasoning shows by the general statement, rules or theories which followed by specific statements or detail, most of the participant shows this form of reasoning on their essay. Meanwhile, the rest prefer to point out their thought in inductive reasoning, as they take a conclusion of a general principle or attitude based on specific facts. Some example found were generalization, analogy and cause-effect relationship (Kristiyani, 2014).

The deductive reasoning is found in the essay made by the 4th participants upon his essay untitled *Impact of The Coronavirus on The Global Economy* also portrays a deductive reasoning;

“Covid-19 pandemic that occurred in various countries had an impact on the health sector and global economy. Finance minister Sri Mulyani explained that due to corona’s spread to 215 countries, 59 of them carried out travel ban and total border shutdown. In addition, there are also 86 countries that impose travel bans and border shutdown partially. Many advanced economies are expected to enter recession this year. Various economic recessions will affect Indonesia as a major trading partner. International Monetary Fund (IMF) predicts that Indonesia’s economy could be minus 0,5% in 2020 and 8,2% in 2021”

He started his first paragraph by a general statement and elaborated on the specific facts he found and supported by many cases.

A type of inductive reasoning used by two of the participants. Firstly, the 3rd participant.

“Everyone is obliged to compete in a globalized world if want to grow up and do not run in the same place. By mastering the English language, people can communicate further so that the insight in information of technology will be more open. Similarly, by having the ability to communicate using the English language is one of the big capital to step in the world and face the technological advances that are always moving forward. In developing countries such as Indonesia, English language as a vital role in all aspects of life, especially in science and technology. Another, it can be used to develop relationship in international forums and to strengthen the link between the nations in the world. Because of this aspect, English is very important for students to be learnt.”

In her essay, she pointed out her idea using cause-effect forms as her closing sentence is *“Because of this aspect, English is very important for students to be learnt.”*

The second-inductive reasoning is pointed out by the 6th participant, as her final essay statements’ are;

“The Ministry of Education should also consider to ‘upgrade’ teacher’s quality, as the quality today is still far from good. Our Ministry of Education’s effort to digitalize the education system would not give any good result before they solved the current major problem we have: Inequality of Education.”

Thinking Systematically

The students are mostly capable of analyzing each part’s interaction and systematically arranging it into a paragraph. The 1st participant created a hortatory exposition text. She started her essay by the beginning (thesis), followed by the elaboration of arguments then

closed the essay by a paragraph consisting of recommendation. On her final part of the essay, she wrote;

“There are some things you can do to prevent yourself from getting infected, firstly you should wash your hands carefully to prevent the spread of germs. Practice good hygiene, don’t share the same tooth brush, towel, or any other stuff like that with anyone else. Stay healthy by eat food that gives you the nutrients you need. Cover your nose and mouth when you sneeze or cough.”

The systematical arrangement of an analytical exposition text also made by the 3rd participant. She delivered the case upon the importance of English clearly and gradually. Start from the beginning (thesis), followed with the arguments, and ended by her reiteration.

“In globalization, there are many challenges and competitions which are very tight, everyone is demanded to not only have a high level of education, but also required to have skill.” (thesis)

“Here are the reasons why English is very important to be learnt:

English as an International Language...” (arguments)

“Looking at the fact, the capability of English will become the contributing factor of success in academic and job. Therefore, in this era of globalization it is important to learn or speak English or other foreign languages.” (reiteration)

The systematically arrangement of analytical exposition text is also pointed out by the 4th participant as he wrote the essay untitled *Impact of The Coronavirus on The Global Economy*. He started his essay by the thesis, introducing the issues and followed by the elaboration of the arguments, including the best-case scenario conditions and closed by the reiteration involving his thought upon the case/the issues. In her closing paragraph he wrote;

“I personally believe that economical side is a vital thing and not an easy thing to get recovered. Unless, the pandemic is stopped, but economies and markets around the world might continue their free fall. So, right now our task is ‘hold our hands’ to make this problem end and life happily after.”

In the *Homework does not Improve Grades* essay, the 5th participant systematically arranged his idea from the general thought until the complex one, or the specific problem. He used the proper structure of hortatory exposition text he made. As we can see in his essay’s last paragraph;

“In the end if we want to have a bright future, we cannot do the same thing over and over again, because if we do the same thing, the ending will be the same too. We should do something better than before. We should understand students’ abilities and make something to support the abilities and not make something that will burden students because students are our country’s future.”

Another form of a systematical arrangement of hortatory exposition text is also pointed out by the 6th participant since she started to bring the issues in the beginning, continued by the arguments of her and finished by the recommendation for the issues or the problem itself. Her final paragraph was the recommendation of the problem solving;

“The Ministry of Education should also consider to ‘upgrade’ teacher’s quality, as the quality today is still far from good. Our Ministry of Education’s effort to digitalize the education system would not give any good result before they solved the current major problem we have: Inequality of Education.”

However, out of the 6 participants, the 2nd participant did not point out the essay similar systematic arrangement. She started the essay with a good statement, but she looks randomly pointed her ideas without a good arrangement of ideas for the next paragraph and missed the concluding paragraph. She ended her essay by the following paragraph ;

“Furthermore, we can do the reforestation. The company that use organic product can do such as reforestation or go green action, with the benefit that they have, they can do that. It still can be handle, rather than if it uses that chemical product. How to take care of the trash or water pollution will be more difficult to handle than do reforestation. They will ruins the ecosystem without do any fix things.”

Analyze and Conclude

The next point of consideration upon students’ critical thinking can be viewed through their ability to analyze the arguments/information, interpreting it and concluding through certain reflection. One of the participants wrote the essay under the title *Impact of The Coronavirus on The Global Economy*. He started the essay by giving his analysis upon several cases appear in the society, including the impact of Coronavirus on stock market, the more people seeking work, oil prices crash, risk of recession, the damage into travel industry, and the slowed factories, specifically in China as the major producers.

Followed by his conclusion and reflection on the information stated before;

The best-case scenario would be a downturn that is more severe than GFC (Global Financial Crisis, 2008) but shorter lived. The best-case scenario assumes several conditions:

First, the US, Europe and other heavily affected economies would need to roll out widespread Covid-19 testing, tracing and treatment measures, enforced quarantine and a full-scale lockdown of the type that China has implemented.

Second, monetary policymakers, who have already done in less than a month what took them three years to do after the GFC must continue to throw the ‘kitchen sink’ of unconventional measures of the current crisis.

Third, governments need to deploy massive Fiscal stimulus, including through helicopter drops of direct cash disbursements to households. Unfortunately, for the best-case scenario, the response in advanced economies has fallen far of what is needed to contain the pandemic.

Furthermore, the 6th participant was also stated;

Students in Indonesia’s capital city, Jakarta, are left behind by 128 years in education.....

As the information of students’ competencies gained, she continued by her conclusion that the biggest cause is coming from the teacher;

Teacher’s Capability, the main factor for one’s education, teacher.

Teacher’s capability in teaching gives a huge influence on the education quality. The teachers played the role...

Then she concluded that;

The Ministry of Education should also consider to ‘upgrade’ teacher’s quality, as the quality today is still far from good.

Solving Different Kinds of Problem

Based on the research, most successful learners are also having the capability to solve different kinds of problem through different ways, continued by asking certain questions that clarify the difference of point of view and leads the question mentioned into a solution. Those point of aspects arises in the essay made by them. Specifically, the 1st participant expressed her ideas upon the preventive solution for *Meningitis* ;

“There are some things you can do to prevent yourself from getting infected, firstly....”

The solution of the problem was also pointed out by the 4th participant. His statement was;

“So, right now our task is ‘hold our hands’ to make this problem end and life happily after.”

The 5th participant also showed his response for solving the problem by stating;

“In the end if we want to have a bright future, we cannot do the same thing over and over again, because if we do the same thing, the ending will be the same too. We should do something better than before. We should understand students’ abilities and make something to support the abilities and not make something that will burden students because students are our country’s future.”

The last, 6th participant provides a problem solving upon the issue of education problem in Indonesia by increasing the teachers’ competencies;

“The Ministry of Education should also consider to ‘upgrade’ teacher’s quality, as the quality today is still far from good. Our Ministry of Education’s effort to digitalize the education system would not give any good result before they solving the current major problem we have: Inequality of Education.”

The profile of successful learners critical thinking was also confirmed by one of the participants’ teachers ;

“She is quite active. If she faced a problem from a topic, she was actively questioning. And I think so far; she has many choices of solutions for each problem she has.” [T3-08]

“Actually, they are really open-minded students. When we talk about politics, when we talk about education, about environmental issues, I think they are really open minded. So, where they could find out the information, could find out some trusted resources and then they try to use the information to back up their arguments. So, they are really capable in solving any kinds of problem.” [T1-08]

Based on the conducted research, the 4c skills required in 21st century skills, specifically critical thinking skill is found arise in the profile of successful learners, as they fulfil the criteria. All participants have used various types of reasoning inside their essays, covering the inductive or deductive type of reasoning. However, most of them use deductive reasoning since they commonly bring the elaboration form the general topics into the specific one and give a certain conclusion, also started with a general statement.

They also arranged the essay systematically to build the interaction between each idea they want to express through their writing. They try to express it systematically, step by step. They do not end the discussion of certain points unless it is completely clear, then moved into the next one. They commonly divide the point of discussion to make it clearer, some of them using numbering while the rest prefer to use such conjunction. However, one of the participants did not show a similar pattern of a systematic essay in which she missed the arrangement of the essay. She has a good opinion related to an issue. However, the way she delivers her thought is still randomly portrayed. For instance, she missed the final statement of her essay, so it goes without any conclusion or closing statement.

It was also admitted by the teacher that in a point of thinking systematically, it also depends on the students' background itself.

If we say systematically, maybe yeah, they are at a different level I guess. For example, participant 3, since she is a debater, so how she thinks logically, systematically and quickly is really well-trained. [T2-06]

Considering not all participants have same background, it affects much into their critical thinking, specifically into their ability of thinking systematically. However, the teachers still admit that most of them are capable to think systematically in general.

Viewing through the participants' ability to relate information, interpret and conclude it into their argument, they do exist. Most of them stated the information earlier, placed it gradually, followed by the description upon their interpretation, then ended with a certain conclusion.

Most of them also think critically solving the problem, whether it is a different kind of problem or a new problem. Some of them were also questioning themselves to clarify the problem and leads to the solution.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research conducted, the researcher found that the successful students' mostly covers the criteria of critical thinking discussed. Furthermore, it was also confirmed by the teacher's perception. Therefore, the researcher concludes that the successful English Learners' critical thinking covers the standard of the skills based on the theory. They can use various types of reasoning, think systematically, analyze and conclude, then solve different kinds of problem.

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