

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the background of the study, the definition of key terms used throughout the research, the research questions, the objectives of the study, and the significance of the study. It begins by outlining the problem that motivates this research, followed by an explanation of the key concepts relevant to the study, and concludes with a discussion of why this research is important for the field of English language education.

A. Background of Study

Critical thinking is an important skill for individuals to develop themselves. This ability is not only important in academic contexts but also in everyday life. According to (Foo, 2019), critical thinking is the deliberate use of cognitive abilities, processes, and systematic strategies in decision-making. This shows that critical thinking skills play an important role in shaping individuals who are able to face life's challenges.

The importance of critical thinking is also emphasized in the Qur'an. Surah Az-Zumar verse 18 states:

الَّذِينَ يَسْتَمِعُونَ الْقَوْلَ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ أَحْسَنَهُ ۗ أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ هَدَاهُمُ اللَّهُ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمْ الْأَوَّلُونَ

This verse require people to maintain an open mind and exercise reason before accepting anything as true. This principle aligns with the core of critical thinking, instead of passively receiving information, critical thinking centers on weighing and selecting reasonable decisions backed by the strongest factual support. When applied to education, this approach can cultivate students to pursue truth through factual verification, making learning consistent with Islamic teachings.

Critical thinking skills are an important competency that must be possessed by students. In the academic world, this ability allows students to analyze information in depth, evaluate arguments objectively, and develop logical and innovative solutions to various problems. However, reality shows that many students still struggle to apply critical thinking effectively. Empirical evidence indicates that university students' critical thinking skills remain relatively low. A study by (Utomo et al., 2024) involving 33 English Department students at Lambung Mangkurat University utilized the adapted version of the Watson–Glaser Critical Thinking Skills Test to measure their critical thinking ability. The results revealed that only 9.09% of the students achieved a high level of critical thinking, while the majority were categorized at moderate (69.69%) and low (21.21%) levels. This distribution demonstrates that most students have not yet developed strong critical thinking skills, suggesting that critical thinking instruction in higher education, particularly in EFL contexts, has not been optimally implemented. This is consistent with (Defianty & Wilson, 2022) who found that EFL learners in Indonesian universities frequently demonstrate insufficient

critical thinking competencies, largely due to teacher-centered instructional approaches that limit opportunities for analytical and evaluative engagement.

In English language learning, critical thinking plays an important role in developing students' understanding and knowledge of a foreign language. For students learning English, critical thinking is not only important for language acquisition but also for academic success and future career opportunities (Naveed et al., 2023). Therefore, the role of lecturers is crucial in fostering and improving students' critical thinking skills, as they serve as the primary facilitators of learning experiences that can either promote or hinder the development of such skills in the classroom.

Given this gap, it is important to examine not only students' critical thinking levels but also the role of lecturers in fostering such skills. A previous study conducted by Lynda Youcef in Algeria investigated lecturers' perspectives on critical thinking (Youcef, 2023). This study explored lecturers' knowledge and understanding of critical thinking, as well as the strategies and challenges they face in encouraging critical thinking among students. The findings indicate that while the majority of teachers demonstrated sound knowledge of critical thinking, they often lacked the necessary support for its effective implementation, leading them to primarily focus on subject matter comprehension. Moreover, these educators encountered various challenges in teaching critical thinking and expressed the need for additional support in this aspect. Consequently, the study underscored the demand for tailored professional development programs aimed at integrating critical thinking into the

English language curriculum, materials development, and pedagogical practices (Youcef, 2023).

These findings emphasized the need for similar research to be conducted in other universities and different cultural contexts to better understand how lecturers in other settings perceive and address critical thinking. A closer examination of the existing literature reveals four interrelated gaps that this study seeks to address.

The first is an empirical gap. While (Khairin Utomo et al., 2024) provided empirical evidence that Indonesian EFL students' critical thinking skills remain relatively low, this data was not linked to any systematic investigation of the specific teaching strategies lecturers use or how students themselves perceive those strategies. Similarly, (Dali Youcef, 2023) generated empirical insight into lecturers' perspectives, but did not examine whether or how students' perceptions align with lecturers' reported practices. Empirical evidence connecting lecturers' reported strategies with corresponding, validated student perception data therefore remains limited.

The second is a contextual gap. Existing studies on lecturers' roles and strategies in developing critical thinking have largely been conducted outside the Indonesian higher education context, such as in Algeria (Dali Youcef, 2023), or within Indonesian secondary education rather than university-level English Language Education programs (Anggraeny & Khongput, 2022). Research specifically situated within an English Language Education study program at an Indonesian Islamic higher

education institution, where religious and cultural values intersect with EFL pedagogy, remains scarce (Defianty & Wilson, 2022).

The third is a methodological gap. Most previous studies employed either a single qualitative or quantitative method in isolation, or, as in the case of (Naveed et al., 2023), gathered qualitative data from both teachers and students independently through parallel interviews rather than a design in which findings from one phase systematically inform the development of an instrument for the other. An exploratory sequential mixed-methods design, in which qualitative findings from lecturer interviews are used to construct a quantitative questionnaire administered to students, has not previously been applied to this specific research problem.

The fourth is a theoretical gap. Existing critical thinking frameworks, including those developed by (Facione, 1990) and (Alsaleh, 2020), largely conceptualize critical thinking as an internal cognitive process and have primarily been developed in contexts where the language of instruction and students' first language are the same. These frameworks do not explicitly account for the communicative dimension of critical thinking that becomes salient when students must express their reasoning in a second language, as is the case for EFL learners in this study's context.

By addressing these four gaps, this study contributes to the field of English Language Education in several concrete ways. Empirically, it provides validated data connecting lecturers' reported teaching strategies with students' perceptions of those strategies within a single, coherent dataset. Contextually, it offers context-specific

insight into critical thinking instruction within an Indonesian Islamic higher education EFL setting, a context that remains underrepresented in the literature. Methodologically, it demonstrates how an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design can be used to derive a validated quantitative instrument directly from qualitative interview findings on critical thinking. Theoretically, it contributes a language-specific extension to existing critical thinking frameworks by highlighting the communicative dimension of critical thinking that is particularly salient for EFL learners. Taken together, these contributions are intended to support the development of more contextually grounded and pedagogically actionable approaches to critical thinking instruction in English Language Education programs.

The qualitative aspect explores lecturers' perspectives on critical thinking, while the quantitative aspect investigates students' perceptions of lecturers' strategies in developing critical thinking skills through questionnaires. The research was conducted at Antasari State Islamic University, where English Education lecturers and students participated in interviews and questionnaires respectively. This research aimed to provide a deeper understanding of how critical thinking can be effectively integrated into language education. Therefore, the researcher conducted a study with the title “Exploring the Role of Lecturers in Developing Critical Thinking Skills among English Education Students.”

B. Definition of Key Terms

To avoid misunderstanding and to clarify the scope of this study, several key terms used throughout this research are defined as follows.

1. The role of lecturers

The role of a lecturer encompasses the cognitive, affective, and managerial functions performed in guiding students' learning process. In this study, the role of lecturers specifically refers to how English lecturers at Antasari State Islamic University conceptualize critical thinking, the teaching strategies they implement to foster students' critical thinking skills, and the challenges they encounter in developing these skills.

2. Critical thinking skills

Critical thinking skills refer to the ability to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information systematically and logically. In this study, critical thinking skills refer to the students' ability to analyze information, evaluate different viewpoints, and make logical judgments in classroom learning, particularly as influenced by lecturers' role-modeling practices.

3. English Education Students

English Education students refer to university or college students enrolled in an English education program. English education students in this study refer to students in English Education Department at Antasari State Islamic University.

4. Lecturer perception

Perception is a person's view or knowledge in understanding something. In this case, lecturers' perceptions refer to lecturers' opinions about the knowledge, strategies, and challenges faced by lecturers in improving students' critical thinking skills.

5. Strategy

Strategy is a way or method used to achieve specific goals. In this study, strategy refers to the approaches and practices demonstrated by lecturers in fostering students' critical thinking skills. These practices include encouraging inquiry, promoting logical reasoning, facilitating discussion, and demonstrating critical thinking through classroom interactions and teaching activities.

C. Research Questions

The main questions to be addressed in this research are:

1. How do English lecturers conceptualize critical thinking skills in higher education?
2. What teaching strategies do English lecturers implement to foster students' critical thinking skills?
3. What challenges do English lecturers encounter in developing students' critical thinking skills?

D. Objectives of Study

This study aims to:

1. To explore how English lecturers conceptualize critical thinking skills in higher education.
2. To identify the teaching strategies implemented by English lecturers to foster students' critical thinking skills.
3. To identify the challenges encountered by English lecturers in developing students' critical thinking skills.

E. Significance of Study

This study has both theoretical and practical significance in the field of English education. Theoretically, this study contributes to the existing knowledge on critical thinking by exploring how lecturers perceive critical thinking in students' cognitive development. This study identifies lecturers' teaching strategies and students' perceptions regarding those strategies. Furthermore, by examining the role of teachers, this study reinforces the constructivist and learner-centered teaching approach, which emphasizes the importance of active learning in language education.

Practically, this study provides valuable insights for various stakeholders in education. For teachers, this study offers practical strategies that can be applied to improve students' critical thinking skills in English education programs. By

understanding effective teaching approaches, educators can refine their teaching methods to create a more engaging and thought-provoking learning environment. For students, this study highlights the importance of critical thinking in their academic and professional lives, encouraging them to develop analytical and problem-solving skills. For the English Language Education Study Program at UIN Antasari Banjarmasin, this study contributes empirical data on lecturers' teaching strategies and students' perceptions of critical thinking instruction. These findings can serve as a reference for curriculum development, the evaluation of teaching strategies within the program, and efforts to strengthen critical thinking as part of the program's graduate learning outcomes, in line with the demands of 21st-century English language education. Finally, for future researchers, this study provides empirical data and theoretical perspectives that can be used as a foundation for further studies on pedagogy, critical thinking, and language education in various educational settings.

With both theory and practice in place, this research aims to improve the overall quality of English education, ensuring that students acquire the essential critical thinking skills necessary for their academic success and future careers.