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Investigating Indonesian Master's Students' Perception of Critical Thinking in Academic Writing in a British University

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Abstract

Critical thinking is generally valued as expected outcomes of university graduates although the concept of it is controversial. Students are required to display it in academic writing which is the default of university assessment. However, international students from “non-Western” backgrounds in particular, frequently experience difficulty in demonstrating critical expression in their written texts. The current study, in the light of interviews with four Indonesian master’s students, therefore, aims at investigating their perception of critical thinking, exposing some factors perceived to be influencing the application of critical thinking in academic writing, and exploring their development of critical thinking. The results of the analysis reveal that although they were raised and educated in different cultural and educational context, they have a sufficient understanding of the concept and passionately engage with critical thinking. The findings also show that despite the influence of culture and educational background on their writing style, the participant have ability to adequately adapt to a new discourse. The challenges they faced include a lack of evaluation and synthesis skills, structuring ideas, and grammatical problems. The study suggests the need for the university and tutors to evaluate their writing instructions to focus more on providing writing practices and review the custom of conventional form of essay to accommodate more a range of divers yet unique expression.

Keywords

Critical Thinking, Academic Writing, Interview-Based Qualitative Approach, Thematic Analysis, Non-Western Students

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Investigating Indonesian Master's Students' Perception of Critical Thinking in Academic Writing in a British University

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Critical thinking is generally valued as expected outcomes of university graduates although the concept of it is controversial. Students are required to display it in academic writing which is the default of university assessment. However, international students from “non-Western” backgrounds in particular, frequently experience difficulty in demonstrating critical expression in their written texts. The current study, in the light of interviews with four Indonesian master’s students, therefore, aims at investigating their perception of critical thinking, exposing some factors perceived to be influencing the application of critical thinking in academic writing, and exploring their development of critical thinking. The results of the analysis reveal that although they were raised and educated in different cultural and educational context, they have a sufficient understanding of the concept and passionately engage with critical thinking. The findings also show that despite the influence of culture and educational background on their writing style, the participant have ability to adequately adapt to a new discourse. The challenges they faced include a lack of evaluation and synthesis skills, structuring ideas, and grammatical problems. The study suggests the need for the university and tutors to evaluate their writing instructions to focus more on providing writing practices and review the custom of conventional form of essay to accommodate more a range of divers yet unique expression. Keywords: Critical Thinking, Academic Writing, Interview-Based Qualitative Approach, Thematic Analysis, Non-Western Students

It is arguable that critical thinking (CT) constitutes one of graduate desirable outcomes of tertiary education in Britain. In fact, critical thinking is the central criterion of a good essay (Scott, 2000; Wingate, 2012) which is a common form of assessment for master students especially in social sciences such as education, law, communication, and other programs. International students thus are required to be able to adapt to this “Western” academic convention (Higher Education Academy, 2014) which might be different from what they have been familiar with, to be able to meet the academic writing requirements at higher education and to blend and be a part of academic community. They are expected to demonstrate argument, synthesis, and analysis and evaluation skill in written assignments to show their critical thinking.

In spite of the importance of adjusting to such Anglophone academic discourse, international students coming from non-Western academic culture, such as Asian, are often claimed as failure to do so. For example, in their studies of teaching argumentation to university students, Bacha (2010) and Davies (2008) state that most students are struggling with understanding the requirement of integrating argumentation in their academic essays or

struggling in doing so. One of the factors that brings this confusion is because there is no clear cut between tutors' expectations and students' perceptions on the requirements as Andrews (2003, p. 120) states, "when there is a mismatch between tutors' and students' expectations trouble can ensue."

Pertaining to this undesirable phenomenon, many recent studies and debates have focused on factors affecting CT particularly as expected in Western academic cultures. On the one hand, some (Atkinson, 1997; Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999) believe that cultural background of international students contributes to the barriers of analytical and CT development. This assumption, however, receives disagreement from some scholars. Yoshino (2004), for example, points out that the assumption blaming certain whole systems of cultural practice as a hindrance of the acquisition of critical thinking is in itself uncritical. On the other hand, Tapper (2004), and Andrews (2007) argue that the failure of integrating CT experienced by international students is partly because the institution including the tutors and the staff(s) does not give explicit and adequate explanation regarding their expectation on students' academic writing with respect to their discourse practice and conventions.

The above contention can provide useful perspectives to foreground the discussion on the concept and practice of CT at the university. However, it is likely necessary to collect insiders' perspectives in order to capture the whole picture of their academic writing experiences including the difficulties of developing and implementing critical thinking. The connection between academic writing and CT is that academic writing involves the ability of writers to show their argument by presenting their own view and engaging with different perspectives by evaluating the source and providing evidence to support the writers' claims. This is inclined with critical thinking. So far, the studies on CT and argument in academic writing have been conducted involving students from different background culture such as, not to mention all, Japan (McKinley, 2013), Arabic (Bacha, 2010), and mostly China (Liu, 2005, Shaheen, 2016), but there has not been any significant study done that includes Indonesian master's students. As one of population that comprise a large portion of non-UK students studying across cities in the UK, although the number is not as significant as other countries such as China and India, it is likely that the study of Indonesian students' perceptions of CT in academic writing may contribute and enrich the study on CT and academic writing. Furthermore, by presenting a relatively small-scale qualitative interview research, we have emphasized on participants' agencies of a small group of Indonesian master's students and exposed their understandings, concerns, difficulties and behaviours towards their adaptation process to Western academic milieu in the context of higher education in the UK.

It is worth pointing out that instead of measuring their CT or assessing the effectiveness of a certain CT instructions in the university. The focus of this study is on students' perceptions and experiences. The goal of this study is to shed light on a year-long learning experiences and difficulties that international students have been through to cope with new academic conventions. It is expected to be fruitful for the participants to express their concerns regarding their master study experiences and to make others aware of their academic perceptions. It also aims at providing possible solutions to better support students to integrate and develop CT in academic writing by emphasizing key challenges and realities from international students' viewpoints. This study thus aimed to answer the following research questions:

How do Indonesian students perceive academic writing in general and critical thinking in particular?

Which problems do Indonesian students encounter with expressing critical thinking in English academic essays?

How do Indonesian students perceive their development in academic writing and critical thinking skills during university study in the UK?

The Concept of Critical Thinking (CT)

CT has been widely discussed particularly in a pedagogical context. However, defining the concept of critical thinking is rather challenging. Although it conveys a broader sense by virtue of what it encompasses, it remains a concept that involves uncertainty and debates particularly in what and how it implemented. CT can be seen by a range of definitions given by different scholars.

Norris and Ennis (1989, as cited in Tran, 2018) has defined CT as “reasonable and reflective thinking that is focused upon what to believe and do” (p. 64). They propose pragmatic perspective of higher quality of decision to have better quality of life. Others (Garside, 1996; McPeck, 1981; Siegel, 1990) link CT to a skill domain and attitude domain. According to this perspective, what is important in CT is not only ability to demonstrate related skills such as observing, inferring, generalizing, reasoning, and evaluating, but more than that it also entails propensity to “seek and to base judgment and action upon reasons” (Siegel, 1990, p. 39) to arrive at objective assessment of related evidence. Mason (2007) offers particular features of critical thinking including (1) “the skills of reasoning” (p. 343); (2) a disposition of both a critical attitude and a moral orientation; and (3) “a substantial knowledge of particular content” (p. 344).

Despite the diverging definitions of the CT concept, there is a salient feature in all the perspectives reviewed. This is due to the vague concept of CT which can be enunciated differently from varying perspectives. Crenshaw, Hale, and Harper (2011) have negative view on the lack of consensus in the concept of critical thinking. They argue that diverse concept could inhibit the development of research in such field. Uniform concept of critical thinking would certainly stimulate unity, but according to Jenkins (2011) and Moore (2013), it would also decrease the perspective of studying critical thinking which contribute to its dynamicity and open rooms for discussion for future researchers.

In the university context, despite the varying point of views on its concept, CT is commonly associated with general key terms such as enquiry, evaluation, analysis, inference, reflection, and judgment (Tapper, 2004). Similar vein was also found in Tsui’s (2002) study. She asserts that in spite of the ranging views of critical thinking, there seems to be an agreement within literature that CT is expressed in a way learners “identify issues and assumptions, recognise important relationships, make correct inferences, evaluate evidence or authority, and deduce conclusion” (Tsui, 2002, p. 743).

In academic writing, the abilities associated with critical thinking are manifested through the process of argumentation such as essay, journal article, dissertation, and thesis. Andrews (1995, p. 3) defines argument as a group of statements aimed at developing “a position and implying response to another (or more than one) position.” We would argue that argument is the development of one’s position regarding related issues in which the discussion in the writing be based upon. This is in accordance with the statement by Bonnett (2001, p. 50) “your essay is your argument, everything else makes sense because of it.” Therefore, argument is essential feature of the essay (Elander et al., 2006). Argument is also considered as one of the key manifestations of critical thinking (Andrew, 1995; Scott, 2000).

Students are required to show argumentation in their essays to demonstrate their analytical thinking. However, they either lacked skill of implementing argument or became trapped in misconception. Read et al. (2001) point out that most students perceive argument as presenting their own opinions or views. We would argue that argument is beyond presenting original views. According to Branthwaite et al. (1980), tutors as the graders are more likely

regard supported assertion than original views alone without any “back up.” Another common misunderstanding among students is that argument is demonstrated merely through being in opposition by blatantly criticising other existing views. However, Andrews (1995) points out, an argument is a result of an engagement with diverging perspectives within particular manners: evaluating the source and incorporating convincing evidence to support the authors’ own claims. In this sense, it could be argued the idea of argument involves not merely negative confrontations but also confirmation or compromising the existing different point of views.

Additionally, tutors do not make themselves clear in stating the principle of a well-developed argument, which does not clear the confusion. Read et al. (2001), for example, point out that students are commonly left behind scrambling in the dark for figure out the “code” in the writing. Others, such as Mitchell et al. (2008) assert that tutors are uncertain in explaining how to argue to students by interchangeably using the terms critique, critical analysis, and opinion. In more recent study of argumentation, Wingate (2012) points out that the tutor feedback and comment on students’ writing mostly address the surface issue. Whereas the problem of the students is actually linked more deeply to the crucial element of argumentation.

From pedagogical perspective, therefore, there is a need to practice implementing CT in terms of argumentation, not just focusing on the theory. Students need to be informed on what components comprise argumentation. In this respect, it might be relevant to refer to Wingate’s (2012) three components of argumentation which she has synthesised from other scholars’ definition such as Andrews (1995), Toulmin et al. (1984) and Wu (2006). These three components are 1) “analysis and evaluation of content knowledge” (Wingate, 2012, p. 146). It refers to the ability to select and evaluate relevant sources and use them as back up and to develop a position; 2) “the writer’s development of a position” (ibid). This component requires the expression of voice or stance; and 3) the presentation of that position in coherent manner. It emphasises a relevant rhetorical skill to present the position in logical text structures.

To conclude, after reviewing the range definition of CT, we would argue that the concept of CT is a dynamic one, which comprises of social and cognitive activity. In academic composition, it divulges itself in form of argumentation. CT is essential in education especially in the university level, as it is a default assessment of academic writing in such a level of education.

The Importance of Critical Thinking at a University Level

CT has become one of required skills one should possess to be accepted in college in the US (William, 2007, as cited in Tran, 2018). Beyond academic dimension, critical thinking plays significant role in the workplace. Tapper observes how employers demand graduates who are critical beings and able to apply this higher-order cognitive skill into their work (2004). Moreover, in broader society context, Elander et al. (2006) point out that critical thinking enables individuals to develop from passive recipients into active participants. As Tsui (2002) also stated, infusing CT means grooming individual to be autonomous lifelong learners. Therefore, as a part of education system, tertiary level is responsible to train students to develop CT.

Mastering CT, however, may be challenging for most people. In fact, van Gelder (2005) believes mastering this skill is as difficult as becoming fluent in a second language. Nevertheless, students could receive some support from classroom instruction to use CT which could further develop as their default thinking. Garside (1996) recommends classroom activities that emphasise the engagement of students’ participation, meaningful interactions, and chances for students to actively question and argue. Encouraging students to be “skeptical” and to argue, can encourage them to be independent learners that are able to develop their own learning.

However, one must bear in mind that CT needs not only to be included as a requirement of a high-scoring academic writing, but it also needs to be recognized by most of students as beneficial for their academic, social, and personal lives. In this way, CT is not a temporary obligation but a permanent and necessary medium for students to explore.

Challenging Factors for Most International Students to Integrate Criticality in Their Academic Composition

Subject Knowledge

Mastering content knowledge is considered an important factor affecting the development of CT. Garside (1996) highlights the importance of adequate content knowledge in order to be able to think critically about some issues in that domain. It might be true since the task of identifying faulty, argument and connections in relevant texts will be much harder if we know less about the topic discussed. However, students often struggle to develop arguments for their critical purposes as the result of, among others, unfamiliarity with the issue (Andrews, 2007; Wingate, 2012).

As far as the relationship between CT and learning is concerned, McPeck (1981) views CT as discipline-specific and argues that CT should be better taught in conjunction with other disciplines (Garside, 1996; Moore, 2004). Although his view allows debates among scholars, including Johnson (1992) and Dam and Volman (2004), it inspires recent studies examining content-based instruction (CBI; Melles, 2009; Pally, 2001; Kasper and Weiss, (2005) and thematic instruction (Thompson, 2002) to approach and teach CT. These studies suggest that discipline-based instruction where students can learn both content knowledge and core assessment criteria could enhance students' CT and argumentation skill.

Authorial Voice

Among the difficulties that students have often been through in expressing criticality in their writing is in terms of presenting their "voice," which has become a problem for both students from Western and non-Western academic culture. The challenges associated with establishing authorial voice in writing has been of a wide discussion in many scholars' works (Groom, 2000; Hyland, 2003; Lillis, 2001; McKinley, 2013). Implementation of writer opinion is a crucial element of desirable academic English writing, yet students are hardly informed the practical steps of expressing voices (Street, 2009; Wingate, 2012).

Groom (2000) classifies common patterns of challenges related to presenting "voice." The first one is "solipsistic voice" referring to over stating writers' opinions without consulting any references to support their claims. The second is called "unaverred voice" which used to students who presents other writers' different perspectives but fail to present their own; the third is "unattributed voice." It means students present others' opinion and claim it as if they are their voices.

In addition, Groom (2000, p. 65) states that International students who are not accustomed to challenge existing authors or views may suffer from constructing "workable balance" between their voices and those of other authors. Instead of presenting their own position in a logical manner, they often end up enumerating different perspectives in a descriptive manner (Andrews & Mitchell, 2001). However, local students who are already accustomed in single voice essay in secondary schools may also experience similar problems in higher education as they are expected to bring together multiple perspectives from various sources and present them in monologic form (Andrews, 2007).

Structuring Essays

Wingate reports students expressing their CT is a common difficulty in structuring essays (2012). As far as writing approaches are concerned, Peck and Coyle (1999, as cited in Elander et al., 2006) divide approaches to writing into two aspects: form-driven and content-driven. The first includes generic skills to build surface structures such as how to make a good paragraph and sentences, while the second refers to deep aspect of structure related with linking the content or ideas. Structuring in the second sense goes further to logical arrangement to present writers' positions in a coherent manner.

Most of the structuring problems in higher education faced by international students who come from countries that have different rhetorical patterns from English, such as most Asian countries, are related to the content-driven area (Wingate, 2012). Often, the failure of presenting a clear structure or a logic argument is associated with rhetorical patterns differences between first language (L1) and English. In Japan, for example, the Japanese rhetorical writing pattern which emphasizes non-logical structure is often claimed to be inhibiting to Japanese students in producing clear and critical writing (McKinley, 2013). Arabic (Bacha, 2010), Chinese (Liu, 2005), Korean, German, and Spanish (Hinds, 2001; Hyland, 2003) students share the same experience since their L1 tend towards reader-responsible against writer-responsible of English rhetorical pattern. Since students coming from those countries may use resources which are no longer appropriate in constructing arguments in English, they may need an instructional intervention of a whole English academic convention.

Linguistics Challenges

Writing in a second or foreign language may be argued to be a difficult task, particularly when there is a great deal of disparity among two language systems let alone the academic writing conventions. Low language proficiency will result in problems in independent expressions. Huang (2008) reports most students find difficulties to express CT because they lack language skills regardless of their understanding of what critical thinking entails.

Furthermore, in terms of academic writing, the problem of insufficient language skills does not only associate with reading and writing, but the problem also includes language forms such as grammar. Some teachers tend to take the problem of grammar for granted and neglect it from academic writing instruction. Canagarajah (2002, p. 46), however, argues "form shapes content." In other words, messages are easy to understand when they are well-structured and put in grammatically correct sentences. International students, in particular, need to be encouraged to appropriately negotiate grammar to express critical thought. Critical thought suggests the inclusion of grammatical instruction in academic writing courses.

Overall, this review suggests that despite the importance of CT in tertiary education, its concept entails considerable ambiguities and peculiarities. In a pedagogical context, the discussion includes cultural sensitivity, particularly how the cultural background of students influences their adaptability to use critical thinking, which might be perceived differently in other contexts. Accordingly, international students encountered some challenges in adapting critical thinking given their differing cultures, past experiences, and language proficiency. The studies on what international students understand about critical thinking have been conducted in order to fully understand the critical thinking experience from the perspective of practice rather than from theory. Indonesian students are not the exception. However, less attention seems to be given to Indonesian students. Therefore, this study expects to fill this gap, and academic writing practice was chosen as the focus of the research, since it is the default assessment in higher education and where students' critical performances are judged.

Methodology

This study uses an interview based qualitative approach. The focus is on the perception of four Indonesian master students studying in one university in the UK about critical thinking and their engagement with CT in academic writing during their study. Kvale (2007) states that the qualitative research interview approach serves to gain in-depth insight into individual beliefs, attitudes, and life experience.

Research Participants

The participant selection process was made on the basis of purposeful sampling. Cohen et al. (2018) states that purposeful sampling is effective when a researcher looks for participants who are likely to provide them with in-depth information to address the research questions set in the study. However, one must bear in mind that although purposeful sampling enables the researcher to efficiently obtain participants, the selected samples do not intend to embody the larger population (Cohen et al., 2018). To protect participants' safety, privacy, and confidentiality, all personal information is removed from the data and only the researchers can access the data. The study does not require ethical review since it does not involve animals, vulnerable children and adult, and other vulnerable groups. The participant had also signed the participation consent form.

The participants were recruited from a university in the UK. Subjects that were considered to be eligible were the Indonesian master students across social science programs. The selection was based on particular parameters such as availability, willingness, and no previous experience of studying in the Anglophone universities, as this study aims to investigate how the participants from non-Anglophone milieu engage in and adapt to academic writing conventions in British universities.

Recruitment resulted in four participants - two males and two females, aged 24 to 28. They were Wira, Cantika, Anton, and Utia (not the actual names). Wira is a student at the Media and Communication School. He had 5 years working experience in the same field and regularly produced academic writings but none in English. His essay marks ranged between merits to distinction, reflecting his competence in academic writing, although he was struggling in his early days of study. Cantika is a student focusing on teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) program. Unlike Wira, she has a background in English academic writing, as she had previously studied a similar subject for her undergraduate degree. Although her first essay was not as good as expected, she experienced steady improvement in her subsequent essays. Anton and Utia are from Finance and Investments and Global Development and Education schools, respectively. They had practiced writing for graduate management assessment test (GMAT) and IELTS writing. Their marks ranged between pass and merit. Unlike the other three participants who are merely assessed by written assignments, Anton must complete formal exams as a main assessment method in his course.

Data Collection and Data Analysis Procedures

Data Collection

We conducted the pilot interview prior to the main interview. It is worth noting that the data was collected from the main interview. Furthermore, the pilot interview has enabled the authors to notice any flaw and limitation of the interview process including the technical aspect such as interview questions guidelines and the recording system (Kvale, 2007). The pilot interview includes two subjects that comply with the criteria set for the participants and took

about 30-45 minutes. Some changes in the interview question guidelines had been made based on the result of the pilot interview. The changes made were the reduction/elimination of some items in the questionnaire due to their irrelevance to the study.

The data was collected during the completion of academic terms, in July 2018. By this time, the participants must have submitted, gained feedback, commented, and reflected on their assignments. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes. The interviews were semi-structured, meaning that although the research is preoccupied with predetermined topic questions, they are more flexible according to the participants' responses and contexts (Berg, 2007). The interviews were conducted in English, but some participants often communicated in Bahasa Indonesian particularly when they were expected to give more detail information or when they were unsure about saying particular terms in English. The questions were organized around the topic and structured to capture from general to specific information. The interview started with discussing general information of past writing experience and perception of academic writing. The interview then developed to a more specific discussion on participants' perceptions of critical thinking in academic writing and any difficulties they had been through in demonstrating an argument or criticality. We were interested in their opinion of whether Indonesian writing conventions and academic practices had influenced the way they demonstrate critical writing, as was contested in existing literatures. It should be noted that the goal of the study does not measure participants' criticality. Instead, it aims at gaining their perceptions about critical thinking and how they engage CT in their tasks. Therefore, the interview questions are structured to have participants share their learning experiences and the way they deal with difficulties they face when doing their essays. Thus, we asked generic questions that allowed participants to engage and reflect in such matter. The interview ended with probing questions that invite any recommendations for the university to improve the instruction of academic writing and critical thinking.

Data Analysis

The interview data was processed through thematic analysis (TA). TA is a widely used method to analyse qualitative data. TA enables the researcher to examine dataset by identifying patterns of themes across the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The first step was transcribing the interviews, which was done right after the interview is conducted. The transcriptions were done in verbatim, yet some were edited for length and fluidity such as eliminating hesitations and translated to English. Then, we read the transcription multiple times in order to be familiarized with the data and code recurring themes. The next step we took was grouping the themes under categories, which were based upon the patterns that appeared from the data set. Several categories coincided with those in the literature, but some were different. In this way, the coded data could be compared and analysed. In the report of findings, we included the excerpts from the data as the evidence to support the interpretation of the findings. In regard to validity, triangulation was done by letting the participants cross check the transcripts and referring to the data with the theory used in the study.

Findings

The findings were grouped under the themes that linked to the research questions. Those themes were academic writing requirement (RQ 1), perceptions of critical thinking (RQ 1), challenges in applying critical thinking in academic writing (RQ 2), and perception of development in participants' academic writing and critical thinking (RQ 3).

Academic Writing Requirement

We asked generic questions about the participants' opinions of elements found in good essays, before directly asking the participants about their perceptions of CT. What is interesting was not only most of the interviewees mentioned CT even without being prompted, but also their mention of other factors in their list.

All participants associated a good essay with having a clear structure. They often linked good essays to the directness and conciseness which are not a part of their L1 writing pattern. One of the participants also linked a clear structure with structuring ideas to build a unified and logical argument as he exemplified as follow:

For example, I knew some of my friends wrote about the case study of their home country in Taiwan. When they write the case study of their respective countries in which we have no clues what is happening there and how it is happened, if they suddenly jump to the case without any proper introduction or narrative about it, then we will not fully understand the case.

Critical thinking was also perceived as a component of successful writing by some participants. However, two participants referred to successful writing as "giving nuance ideas" and "critical analysis." Although the other two did not explicitly link CT to good essays, their responses implied the importance of CT in British university. One of the statements is as follow:

First of all, you have to know what you write . . . you have to know how to present it in a way that err the readers know your argument.

He seems argue that a good essay is where you can present an argument well, which is in line with the concept of critical thinking. As stated by Andrew (1995) and Scott (2020), argument is one of the manifestations of critical thinking.

A good essay was also associated with mastering the content knowledge that enable the development of the argument and to have a right answer to the question of the essay. The second view was taken up by one participant as he reflected the requirement in his discipline, Finance and Investment.

In addition, the interviewees revealed their feelings about their academic writing experience during one-year master study. Their attitude toward writing practices was relatively positive although they were struggling in the initial days. Wira, as an example, had described his initial academic writing experience as "painful." He probably had this attitude because he had no previous experience of academic writing in English, as in the beginning, he felt nervous of not being able to write properly. We were interested to know why he felt so, and after probing more, he divulged his view of grammar as both important but the hardest part of essay writing.

If we speak and write in Bahasa, we do not have to think about the grammar (...) we do not have to think about (using) the past, present and future (verbs). I mean it is very important especially in my major. Because in (the school of) media and communication, you have to write about political condition (past, present and future)

Even now sometimes I am still confused about the grammar. That's why I said it was very painful.

Utia was not clear about her feeling toward her writing experiences. However, she compared academic writing in University to IELTS writing and found that the first is more complex as it requires a lot of readings to construct well-evident argument.

Perception of Critical Thinking

As explained in the previous section, all participants had a good understanding of the necessity to present CT in their academic writing. However, when asked specifically about their understanding of CT, their responses revealed both consensus and heterogeneity of definitions.

Utia and Cantika view critical thinking as synthesizing reliable sources and inserting their own ideas. They emphasised that critical thinking in academic writing is accomplished through comparing and contrasting different views before presenting their own voice, for example:

We can compare and contrast from different sources so we can get different views

Wira perceived CT as a way of thinking based on people's perspectives. He exemplified that people could read the same news, but what makes them different is they would read (analyse) it based on their own experiences which could assist them in forming a perspective. Anton, on the other hand, viewed critical thinking as logical reasoning and structuring the argument.

In addition, some interviews said their understanding of the concept of CT did not come naturally. It occurred after conducting practices of academic writing repeatedly. Some admitted that their past academic experiences did not train them in the the practice of CT, as noted:

I haven't been really introduced about this. They just asked us to write something for example try to write academic writing (...) they never really address how to write it.

However, more provocatively, Anton expressed the view that:

They (the tutors) do not give a rigid indicator. They just give guidelines how to answer my exam, you have to present your ideas clearly, you have to write concise and efficient paragraph. But how efficient paragraph should be, they do not give that thing. So I have to explore by myself.

As can be noted from his above quote, one of the reasons that slowing down his adaptability to local customs was that the tutors were unclear about their expectation from students to have in terms of critical thinking in essays. In this sense, the diverse perceptions between students and tutors may lead to misunderstanding of what may be appropriate as critical analysis. It is similar with the previous study. Tapper (2004) reports that the absence of an expected explanation of teachers' expectations on students' academic tasks has become the source of students' failures of engaging with CT. However, the expected explanation in Tapper (2004) focuses on discourse practice and convention. While, in this study the expected explanation was merely on writing skills.

Challenges in Implementing Critical Thinking in Academic Writing

In terms of implementing CT in their essay, the participants expressed some concerns. The result of inductive analysis has shown that participants perceived interrelated challenges such as: synthesizing sources and inserting the writer own's ideas, finding relevant sources, showing grammatical competence, structuring ideas, and navigating cultural challenges.

A common difficulty revealed by the participants was synthesizing relevant sources and presenting their own opinions. Wira failed to show his criticality in his assignment due to the fact that he “was quoting too much sources and did not really engage with that sources” (Wira). He revealed his mistakes after discussing with his tutor and realized that in order to show criticality, he needs to put his own his thought analysing the sources:

What I mean by engage is make a dialogue. By saying dialogue, you know the weaknesses you know the strength of the theory, the concept that you want to quote and you want to analyse it in your essay and my own thought, my own analyses should be more that the quotation.

Likewise, Cantika also described the similar experience in which she did not state her own voice, making her essay too descriptive. She emphasised that her failure is a result of her misconception of CT stating, “as long as we put the words from experts is already critical” (Cantika) finding relevant sources was another area of concern. Utia particularly emphasized, “Finding what to write is more difficult that the writing itself” (Utia). In her endeavour to evaluate other people works, she needs relevant sources to back up her argument. However, she is aware that that writing in the university demands engagement with more readings, and she said, “It is exhausting” (Utia).

Another problem impeding the participants to present their criticality in writing relates to grammatical competence. In general, Wira found that writing academically according to the right grammar was challenging. When specifically asked about difficulties in his attempt to write critically, grammar also his perceived obstacle. He emphasised that:

Actually, I am quite familiar with the subject knowledge, the theories and the concept that I have to use in my assignment. So, there was no problem with that. The problem was the grammar and now I am struggling with that.

Structuring ideas was also perceived as a challenging factor in expressing argument or critical thinking. Anton described structuring ideas in the essay as the hardest part and mentioned his L1 rhetorical structure as affecting his efficacy in expressing critical thought, as he cited:

I think it is a Western culture to put the main ideas first and then back it up with supporting ideas. But in Asia is the other way around. You support it first and you give conclusion at the end. So, I think like that in Indonesia. Wherever I see the questions, I have to flip it and translate it so that is a bit a work for me.

It is apparent from the quote that critical evaluation, as he experienced it in the course, requires a substantial cultural shift in learning and writing approach.

All participants also reported that one of the problems that preclude the application of CT in academic writing may be associated with previous academic systems. They stated that their past academic experiences had adverse influence upon their capability to think critically.

Wira expressed disappointment over teacher/lecturer-centred classroom instruction and examination system which only requires them to memorise the correct answer.

Perceived Development of Academic Writing Skill and Critical Thinking

In discussing the perception of participants' progress of academic writing and CT, the data shows patterns relate to overall views of adaptation process into a British university system. All participants perceived their academic writing skills including critical thinking as getting better although did not reach the expert level. Anton noted, "I believe we are in the phase of getting used to" (Anton). Wira and Cantika, in reflecting on their progress, revealed desirable changes had occurred after having been engaged in a new academic context. As stated earlier they failed their first assignment because of over reliance on presenting sources and not presenting their own voices. Though their view of critical thinking development was relatively positive, their engagement of learning process to write in a new academic context varied.

Most participants found both that support from teachers through comment on paper or teaching method was helpful. Utia reported official hours where she can access one-to-one consultation with tutors was useful in providing insight into "meeting the lecturers' expectation" (Utia). Likewise, Cantika reported that the class instruction of one of her modules in semester 2 had influenced her criticality:

So, every single week, we have to review an article (...). The teacher will comment every single week. So, we have to put the critical analysis on each article. And I think from that training it can enhance my criticality. Because I can read my friend's work (their analysis) as well. Oh, this is how they write critically. So, now I get it more to analyze article critically.

It is apparent from the quote that Cantika considered that learning through practices where she could imply the theories of critical thinking in the writing and share the knowledge with other students effectively enhance her critical thinking. Anton, on the other way, he did not find teacher comments on exam paper significant since they were general feedback for the class. Therefore, he was a risk taker in learning a new writing discourse, citing: "I am kind of person that have to make mistake in order to make substantial progress" (Anton). He appreciated failures as an essential part of learning experience.

Some participants also mentioned attending academic writing instructions such as workshops in the library and in-session course, but they viewed it differently. Wira and Cantika found in-session course helpful for either learning basic academic convention such as referencing, plagiarism, or to learn critical thinking. Wira particularly emphasised his appreciation of this support as it made him change his approach to write critically. Utia also reported joining skill workshops in the library. However, she found official hours more helpful.

Wira realised that critical learning approach he experienced during his master study had a positive impact not only on his academic life but also on his personal experience.

He also commented that the struggle to adapt to CT is not only faced by Indonesian students but also by other students from China, Taiwan, and Thailand. The education system of these students' home countries did not encourage CT. Their situation is worsened because "They do not really familiar with the subject knowledge" (Wira). Their marks were lower despite their advanced proficiency. He added poignant suggestion:

If they want to assist international students to adjust and succeed during their master study in [the] university..., university should requires them to attend pre-session class. Furthermore, the pre-session course should not only

focus on enhancing English proficiency and academic writing but also to enhance their subject knowledge.

Wira highlighted the relevance of ability to express critical thought with sufficient content knowledge. He argued that lack of subject knowledge hinders his mentioned colleges from practicing critical thinking. His pedagogical suggestion seems to confirm McPeck's (1981) belief that critical thinking would be better if taught in relation with students' discipline.

Discussion

This chapter underlines distinctive viewpoints on critical thinking in academic writing that international master students, particularly from Indonesia, could bring to the Western educational setting. We discuss and synthesize the findings in the light of the research questions and existing sources. Our focus is to discuss the findings in relation to the implication of pedagogical perspectives.

How Do Indonesian Master Students Perceive Academic Writing in General and Critical Thinking in Particular?

In regard to the first research questions related to students' perceptions of academic writing and critical thinking, the findings reveal that participants generally had developed a good understanding of what entails a good essay and critical appraisal in academic writing. They were aware that they were required to present indication of clear structure, argument, and critical analysis. In this sense, they seemed to have adequately interpreted most lecturers' perceptions which associated the argument and structure with key elements of successful academic writing (Lillis & Turner, 2001). Similarly, students also vary their understanding of the concept of CT as an analysis and evaluation source, presenting their own opinions, and practicing reflective thinking and reasoning coincide with what discussed in the literature (see Garside, 1996; Mason, 2007; McPeck, 1981; Siegel, 1990; Tran, 2018).

The outcomes of this study, however, do not coincide with a study by Durkin (2008) on Asian students' perceptions of their adaptation to Western norms of critical thinking and argumentation. In such study, many of the participants reported reluctance to fully adapt in the Western norms, and they instead preferred the "middle way." In contrast to that mentioned study, the participants in our research showed willingness to fully assimilate to British academic convention and engage with critical thinking. Though there might be any struggles in adapting critical thinking as they experienced in their master study, the participants' replies reveal positive perspectives towards their academic writing experiences. Only one participant narrated his initial writing experiences to be painful, but his experience was not necessarily a negative one. They recognized the critical approach to writing made their writing process challenging, but they also acknowledged that it made their writings have better quality. Even one of the participants recognized the practice of CT added value to his personal life as CT triggers disposition to think critically and make decisions. For the participants, at least, there seems to be a clear connection between willingness to engage with CT and recognition of CT advantages beyond its main role as assessment criteria. Therefore, as we argued in the literature review, CT should not be introduced only as high-scoring criteria, but also as a medium to improve their life values.

Which Problems Do Indonesian Students Encounter with Expressing Critical Thinking in English Academic Essays?

The second research question aims at identifying some difficulties that the participants experienced when applying critical thinking in their academic writing. The results of this study report participants experienced difficulty in synthesizing and evaluating multiple sources and structuring ideas. The findings suggest prior educational systems, differing rhetorical writing patterns, and linguistic problems influenced the way they approached academic writing and critical analysis in the text.

From Synthesising and Evaluation Skills to Critical Reading Skill

The participants linked difficulties in undertaking critical thinking in academic writing with a lack of evaluation and synthesis skills. On one hand, they are required to show appraisal of scholar works as a part of the academic community. On the other hand, they were less familiar with how to engage with multiple perspectives. Subsequently, participants were only engaging in describing facts of the issues and producing what Groom (2000, p. 67) describes as “unaverred voice.” This outcome echoes the findings of the study conducted by Indah and Kusuma (2016) and Mateos and Solé (2009) reporting that the students are deficient in synthesising skill because they engage less with the sources.

Cantika’s response illustrated the lack of past academic exposure to analysing sources and evaluating arguments, which caused her to misinterpret CT as a summary of experts’ opinions. Whereas critical thinking as it is expected in academic writing as Tsui states (2002) is more about exploring reasons to challenge an existing argument and deducing a conclusion. Kuntjara (2004) states that instruction on writing has not been significantly encouraged and practiced in Indonesian curriculum, although the curriculum has undergone several amendments. The typical writing instruction in secondary schools tends to require students to write but without careful cognitive guidance on how to organize writing. Moreover, a large portion on teachers’ feedback is devoted to linguistic problems, such as grammar and vocabulary but not to content and organization of ideas. We might assume the similar writing instruction in the higher education, but this assumption still required further investigation.

Another factor contributing to lack of evaluation and synthesis skill revealed from some participants’ responses is a lack of content knowledge. This attitude is reflected in Utia’s disclosure that she perceived “finding what to write is more difficult than the writing itself” (Utia) as she was struggling in engaging with different perspectives. Wingate (2012) rightly argues insufficient subject knowledge inhibits the ability to filter related information in the literature and identifying disputable arguments. This may imply the importance for any critical thinking instruction to be integrated with discipline subject area.

According to Borland and Pearce (2002) and Durkin (2004), new academic norms need to be nurtured through conscious instruction. As a part of critical thinking related skill which is a relatively “new convention” for international students, particularly for Asia. Thus, the study suggests a greater importance of instruction focusing on teaching related skills of evaluation and synthesis. This includes teaching a critical reading. Critical reading requires attention to certain parts of the text including the key points and highlighted arguments, evaluation the content, and making judgments (Cottrell, 2005). Those cognitive activities during critical reading process can help writers to compare and contrast distinctive perspectives before they eventually arrive to their opinions. Indeed, as Mazgutova (2017) argues critical reading may also enhance students’ confidence in writing. Likewise, lack of reading ability has been reported in many studies as one factor which contributes to difficulty in synthesizing texts (Risemberg, 1996; Spivey, 1997; Wiley & Voss, 1999).

Structuring Related Problem

Participants in our research also found structuring ideas as not only challenging but also perhaps the hardest part of composing analytical writing. This result is consistent with the finding of the study by Wingate (2012) where structuring was among the common problems of students. An essay with a good structure shows the readers what the writers mean to argue.

Different rhetorical written systems between Indonesia and Britain identified as a factor influencing the difficulty in structuring essays. Kuntjara (2004), who studies cultural transfer in EFL, identifies rhetorical pattern of Indonesian writing as inductive, ambiguous, and impersonal. The pattern is inductive because people tend to state the emphases or main ideas near the end to astonish and amuse the readers. The rhetorical pattern is ambiguous because people tend to use reader-responsible in which readers are responsible to delve into the messages. While the impersonality reflects Indonesians' admiration for harmony and prioritization for communal needs rather than individuals' tendencies, as Indonesians conceal themselves by using "we" instead of "I" when asserting even their own opinions to avoid disconformity. However, Kuntjara (2004) is unconvinced if these cultural patterns are transferred into EFL students' writing, our participants' comments indicate a possibility of cultural transfer. Kuntjara thus reflects Kaplan's (1966) constructive rhetoric which maintains "language and writing are cultural phenomena" (as cited in Hyland, 2003, p. 45).

The prevalence of inductivity and indirectness of Indonesian rhetorical pattern goes against the directness and linear logic of English writing systems. Thus, the difficulty to construct English academic writing let alone to write with a critical approach is reasonable. In fact, rhetorical differences are common problems faced by most Asian students as reported in many studies (Bacha, 2010; Hinds, 2001; Hyland, 2003; Liu, 2005; McKinley, 2013). This rhetorical written structure disparity apparently triggers confusion.

As far as contrastive rhetoric is concerned, we would like to emphasize Anton's experience of adapting a British discourse, and his comment revealing that he felt his logic and creativity was suppressed not by general norm but rather common sense of logic in Western rhetoric:

I think it is a Western culture to put the main ideas first and then back it up with supporting ideas. But in Asia is the other way around. You support it first and you give conclusion at the end. So, I think like that in Indonesia. Wherever I see the questions, I have to flip it and translate it so that is a bit a work for me.

Anton's response represents the internalisation of English in academic discourse may be done with the hope of bringing harmony to discourse between diverse cultures, but the result more often leads to conflict. In order to minimize the conflict, students are frequently required to shift their local wisdom into the dominant discourse. The required shift might not only result in frustration, but is also disrespectful to certain extent. In this regard, we support Canagarajah's (2002) perspective that it is important for prevailing academic community to show deference to cultural uniqueness, which international students may inherently bring. Indeed, teachers should be more flexible to any variation of essay forms, as Andrews (2003) argues despite its rigid norms, an essay opens rooms for personal style "to alter the sequence and play with the tone of genre" (p. 126). In other words, members of academic discourse should employ mutualism approach where students should not only assimilate into new academic culture, but the discourse community should also provide alternative conventions to accommodate different yet unique styles.

Grammatical Problem

The English linguistic systems appear to pose some problems for some participants. Different linguistics systems of L1 and English will lead to frustration for L2 writer and confusion for English readers. This subsequently can interfere with the expression of critical thinking. The outcome revealing linguistics challenges result in interfering the application of critical expression is consistent with Huang's (2006, 2008) studies that found Chinese postgraduate students experience difficulty in critical thinking because of lack of language skill.

Furthermore, the Bahasa Indonesian system has a great difference from English language system. The use of pronoun, for example, there is no gender specific word which refers to a third singular pronoun, because in Bahasa the term *dia* is used for both male and female. While in English system, the third singular pronoun is divided into "he" for male and "she" for female. This just exemplifies a simple rule. There might be more complex systems which go towards syntactical forms. Canagarajah (2002) emphasized that well-grammatically structured sentences clearly represent the intended message, while writing with inappropriate grammar or structure often fail to deliver the message to the readers. This observation suggests that any academic writing or study skill course should include grammatical instruction, as grammatical problems can be transcended as students are more familiar with L2 writing convention.

How do Indonesian students perceive their development in academic writing and critical thinking skills during university study in the UK?

The findings of this research revealed participants' positive developments in both academic skill and critical thinking despite the highlighted struggles in the process of adaptation to a new discourse during their one-year master study. Moreover, the study underlined the ability of the participants to adapt to a new discourse community. They were aware that their previous educational systems which were generally based on teacher-teacher-centred and rote-learning approaches influenced their writing adversely when they approached academic writing in their first days of master study. However, as the participants had done sufficient practices and reflection on their mistakes and errors and received tutors' guidance and support, they had learned how to critically evaluate and synthesise sources, making connection among multiple perspectives and inserting their own arguments to show critical thinking in their essays. In this sense, the findings of our study do not support Ramanatan and Kaplan's (1996, p. 232) view that Asian students are "not ready" and too passive for critical thinking. Instead, our findings echo Canagarajah's (2002, p. 101) views of international students having the "agency to rise above their culture" when they invest considerable efforts and appropriate care.

In addition to a generally favourable response to academic support, most of the participants found one to one consultation with a tutor was helpful for their critical academic writing development. During the consultation process, students might gain clear pictures of what the tutors expected from them. Thus, answering why consultation was more appealing. However, responses were polarised while reflecting on academic writing instruction such as pre and in-session course and workshops on academic skills provided by the university. Most of the informants found the academic writing course was insignificant because the course was general. Instead, they expect the integration of academic writing and critical thinking instruction with their specific discipline be more helpful. Much of the literature (Elander et al., 2006; Kasper & Weiss, 2005; McPeck, 1981; Melles, 2009; Pally, 2001) supports the view that

CT and argumentation in academic writing is discipline-specific and would be better taught with the integration with specific discipline instruction.

Concluding Remarks

This study has examined how master Indonesian students perceived critical thinking in academic writing, the challenges they faced in expressing critical purposes, and how they perceived their critical thinking development in form of academic writing, particularly essays. Notwithstanding the complexities of adaptation into a new academic requirement, the findings indicated the participants appeared to have sufficiently adapted to the new academic system and written convention by means of synchronization, acculturation, and transformation with the new academic written convention. Though they experienced difficulties and anxieties, they were willing and passionately interested in learning and employing critical thinking in and beyond academic context.

The findings also raised intriguing questions regarding the nature and extent of participants' cultures and background in affecting the way they express critical thought in their essays. Their responses showed that lack of exposure to critical thinking practices during prior education may interfere with their uptake of critical evaluation as practice. This suggested a growing concern about the importance of priority and approach shifts in Indonesian the educational system to embed critical thinking in all subjects across education levels. Participants' responses highlighted a strong reflection on this concern.

With regard to perceived challenges in applying critical approach, one of the participants found confusion in using correct grammar as obstacle which is likely to interfere critical expression. However, some aspects that the participants perceived to be more challenging were synthesizing and evaluating multiple sources and structuring ideas. The contrastive rhetoric between L1 and English was mentioned to be predominantly burdensome to the participants as it has tendency to obstruct the flow of logic of their argument. One of the subjects of the study felt that his personal style of communication which reflects his L1 rhetoric pattern was suppressed by the English writing frame. It can be inferred that the participants faced a dilemma, wherein they were expected to express their CT in their essays, but their critical approach to academic writing was relatively disapproved.

International students would bring valuable knowledge and experiences. As the population of international students increases, we agree with Andrews (2003) that lecturers in tertiary education should accordingly adapt dialogical approach. This is to allow a personal way of critical expression but still maintain what are necessary for the academic convention such as showing evidence, referencing systems, coherence, and plagiarism issue. Thus, we want to offer several suggestions to accommodate critical expression that occurred from the findings.

First, students need explicit guidelines in terms of how to evaluate and synthesize sources and to construct argument either provided through writing workshops or individual consultation. Within this instruction, we would reflect Lillis' (2001) views in order to help students meet the expectation of academic requirement. Constant dialogue should be encouraged between students and supervisors. This also aims at marrying cultural wisdom with dominant academic convention in expressing critical thought (Tanaka & Gilliland, 2017).

Second, following the view of McPeck (1981) and Garside (1996) that critical thinking is discipline specific, we would suggest that any instruction of critical thinking in academic writing would be better if integrated with students' academic disciplines. This would be helpful in two respects. First, students can enhance their subject knowledge, which is necessary for the ability to critically analyse and learn how to express their critical purposes. Second, as Elander et al. (2006) argue, students would benefit from understanding specific requirements of the

writing task necessary for their departments. Thus, this understanding helps them address the expectation of the requirement.

It should be noted that this study is based on small scale research involving four participants within a particular context. Any attempts of generalisation, thus, is questionable. However, the findings of this research suggest significant considerations for facilitating international students to gain most benefits of their learning experiences.

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