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GROUP DISCUSSION STRATEGY IN DEVELOPING STUDENTS' CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE *MERDEKA* CURRICULUM

Strategi Diskusi Kelompok dalam Pengembangan Kemampuan Berpikir Kritis Siswa dalam Pengajaran Bahasa Inggris Sebagai Penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji strategi yang digunakan oleh guru untuk meningkatkan keterampilan berpikir kritis siswa dalam konteks pengajaran bahasa Inggris yang selaras dengan Kurikulum Merdeka. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif, dengan memanfaatkan observasi dan catatan lapangan untuk mengumpulkan data tentang bagaimana strategi-strategi ini diterapkan di kelas. Fokus penelitian ini adalah mengidentifikasi teknik-teknik spesifik yang digunakan oleh guru selama diskusi kelompok untuk meningkatkan kemampuan berpikir kritis siswa dalam pengajaran bahasa Inggris di bawah Kurikulum Merdeka. Temuan dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa diskusi kelompok diatur dengan efektif, dan siswa menunjukkan peningkatan signifikan dalam berpikir kritis. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa mengintegrasikan strategi diskusi kelompok ke dalam pengajaran bahasa Inggris merupakan cara yang efektif untuk memupuk keterampilan berpikir kritis siswa, sesuai dengan tujuan Kurikulum Merdeka untuk menumbuhkan pembelajar yang mandiri dan reflektif. Penelitian ini juga memberikan rekomendasi bagi pendidik tentang cara mengoptimalkan diskusi kelompok dan manajemen waktu untuk memastikan keterlibatan aktif siswa dan pengembangan keterampilan berpikir kritis.

Kata Kunci:
Diskusi kelompok
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Keywords:
Group Discussion
Critical Thinking
English Teaching Strategy
Merdeka Curriculum

Abstract.

This research aims to examine the strategies used by teachers to enhance students' critical thinking skills in the context of English language teaching aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum. The study employs qualitative methods, utilizing observation and field notes to collect data on how these strategies are implemented in the classroom. The focus of this research is on identifying specific techniques used by teachers during group discussions to improve student's critical thinking abilities in English language teaching under the Merdeka Curriculum. The findings of this research indicate that group discussions are effectively organized, and students show a significant improvement in critical thinking. The study concludes that integrating group discussion strategies into English language teaching is an effective way to foster students' critical thinking, in line with the Merdeka Curriculum's goal of nurturing independent and reflective learners. This study also provides recommendations for educators on how to optimize group discussions and time management to ensure active student engagement and the development of critical thinking skills.

PENDAHULUAN

The Merdeka Curriculum, introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic as an alternative to the previous K-13 curriculum, represents a significant shift in Indonesia's educational approach. Officially adopted in 2022 through Kepmendikbudristek No. 56/M/2022, this curriculum emphasizes student autonomy, creativity, and the development of character in alignment with the Pancasila Student Profile (Sudaryanto, 2020; Sherly, 2021). Unlike previous curricula, which often focused

on achieving minimum scores, the Merdeka Curriculum prioritizes quality learning and fosters a holistic educational experience (Nafiah & Suyanto, 2014). The Pancasila Student Profile, a core component of this curriculum, aims to cultivate students who are faithful, globally aware, collaborative, independent, critically reasoning, and creative (Nadhiroh & Anshori, 2023).

Critical thinking is a key skill emphasized within the Merdeka Curriculum, crucial for enabling students to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information effectively (Moon, 2007). According to Lai (2011), critical thinkers possess the ability to understand logical relationships, formulate clear ideas, evaluate evidence, and make reasoned decisions. Developing these skills is essential for preparing students to thrive in complex, modern environments. Santika (2020) further underscores that critical thinking involves the ability to evaluate arguments critically and construct sound reasoning.

Various teaching strategies have been identified as effective in enhancing critical thinking, with group discussions, concept mapping, and analytical questioning being particularly impactful (Wang & Seepho, 2017). Group discussions, in particular, facilitate social interaction, knowledge dissemination, and collaborative meaning-making, aligning with the Merdeka Curriculum's goals of fostering student engagement, creativity, and cognitive development (Mcloughlin & Mynard, 2009). Studies by Sa'diyah et al. (2022) and Darnella et al. (2020) advocate for the use of group discussions and concept mapping as effective strategies to enhance critical thinking and help students organize information before it is formally presented by the teacher.

This research focuses on the implementation of group discussions in English classes at SMAN 1 Tigo Nagari, aiming to explore how these discussions can be effectively utilized to develop students' critical thinking skills. The study identifies strategies that enhance student engagement and promote deep cognitive processing. The theoretical framework guiding this research draws on the work of Khalid et al. (2021) and Cubukcu (2020), who emphasize the integration of critical thinking strategies into classroom practice to improve learning outcomes. Observations from classroom practices at SMAN 1 Tigo Nagari suggest that group discussions have been employed effectively as a tool for enhancing student understanding and engagement, reflecting their value in a real-world educational setting.

In this context, the study seeks to contribute to the literature by providing insights into the practical application of group discussions within the Merdeka Curriculum, with the ultimate goal of enhancing students' critical thinking skills and overall learning experience. Critical thinking, as defined by Lau (2011), involves the ability to critically and objectively evaluate information, analyze arguments, and derive conclusions through reasoning. This skill is fundamental to students' academic success, as it enables them to engage with complex concepts and make informed decisions (Ennis, 1989). However, traditional education's emphasis on rote memorization has often hindered the development of these skills, leading to suboptimal learning outcomes (Hamdani et al., 2019). Consequently, there is a growing emphasis on integrating critical thinking into language education curricula to equip students with the necessary tools for academic success (Nold, 2017).

The Merdeka Curriculum, introduced in response to the educational challenges posed by the Industrial Revolution 4.0 and the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasizes the development of critical thinking skills through innovative and flexible teaching strategies. It promotes an autonomous learning environment where students are encouraged to explore their unique potential and develop their thinking abilities (Pendidikan et al., 1907; Suryaningrum, 2022). Group discussions, as a key strategy within this curriculum, provide students with opportunities to engage in collaborative learning,

exchange diverse perspectives, and critically analyze problems (Husain, 2020).

Group discussions have proven to be an effective strategy for enhancing students' critical thinking skills. By engaging in discussions, students can articulate their ideas, evaluate opposing viewpoints, and develop logical arguments (Bean, 2001; Jones, 2014). This method fosters a deeper understanding of the material and encourages active participation, which is crucial for developing critical thinking. However, challenges such as time constraints and unequal participation can limit the effectiveness of group discussions, highlighting the need for careful planning and facilitation by educators (Szabo & Schwartz, n.d.).

Recent research further supports the effectiveness of group discussions in developing critical thinking skills. For instance, Wang and Seepho (2017) found that group discussions, along with concept maps and analytical questions, significantly improve critical thinking among Chinese EFL learners. Similarly, Abdullah et al. (2023) demonstrated that collaborative strategic reading using narrative texts enhances critical thinking in EFL students by encouraging deep engagement with the material. Garside (2009) compared traditional lecture methods with group discussions, concluding that while both methods are effective, group discussions produce more meaningful learning outcomes, particularly in fostering advanced critical thinking.

This research aims to further explore the role of group discussions in enhancing students' critical thinking skills within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum. By examining the implementation of group discussions in English language learning, this study seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on effective teaching strategies that can foster critical thinking and improve learning outcomes.

METODE PENELITIAN

This research was qualitative with a case study approach. The type of research used was content analysis. This research examined certain individuals to obtain complete data by analyzing the data to produce a theory. This research was carried out at SMA Negeri 1 Tigo Nagari. The research subjects were 1 English teacher and 30 class X students as samples. The researchers used purposive sampling techniques to select participants who were able to actively participate and discuss their views in group observations. Data analysis techniques were carried out by analyzing the data obtained to achieve complete and accurate results. The data analysis techniques used in this research were memorizing, classifying, interpreting, and concluding. Based on the theory of qualitative data analysis developed by Creswell (2015). The research instruments used in this research were observation checklists. The elements in the observation checklist were modified to reflect the current situation on the ground. Field notes were used to present the findings of the observations that the researcher made.

HASIL DAN PEMBAHASAN

Based on observations, it answers the research question, "How does the teacher implement a group discussion strategy to develop students' critical thinking in teaching English at SMA N 1 Tigo Nagari grade X?" It is evident that the teacher makes extensive preparations for group discussions by selecting themes that are connected to the student's experiences and the goals of the Merdeka Curriculum. Students are encouraged to think critically about the topics covered by the teacher through the use of questions and exercises.

After analyzing the data, the researcher finds these findings. The findings include identifying assumptions and arguments in group discussions, evaluating different examples and reasons, asking questions, identifying

discussion conclusions, questioning other opinions, exchanging ideas among groups, and summarizing the discussion results comprehensively. Through the provision of background knowledge and the establishment of explicit discussion objectives, the instructor skillfully introduces conversation themes. One of the teacher's strategies is to pose open-ended questions to encourage students to think critically and ensure they understand what is expected of them in participating in the discussion. This aligns with the finding that most students can identify the arguments present in the group discussions, making the discussions more dynamic and less monotonous. However, some students still struggle to express their assumptions or arguments during the group discussions.

Based on the data, the research finds that most students successfully identify the assumptions and arguments presented in group discussions. They articulate the key points that underlie various viewpoints. This aligns with Wang and Seepho's (2017) findings on the importance of recognizing assumptions and arguments as a fundamental aspect of critical thinking. By identifying these elements, students demonstrate their ability to actively engage with and understand different perspectives. However, there is variation in students' ability to distinguish assumptions, indicating a need for further development in this area.

The findings emphasize the evaluation of evidence and reasons that support students' arguments. It shows that students generally evaluate different evidence and reasons, although the quality of this evaluation varies. Some students are adept at assessing the relevance and reliability of evidence, while others encounter difficulties. According to Wang and Seepho, evaluating evidence, examples, and reasons is crucial for effective argumentation and critical thinking. However, this finding indicates that many students require additional guidance and training to enhance their skills in evaluating evidence and reasons.

After that, the teacher uses questioning strategies to encourage students to analyze arguments and interact with these questions, although the relevance of their responses varies. Other research, such as Lau (2011), emphasizes that asking questions is a key technique in developing students' critical thinking. By encouraging students to question and analyze various assumptions, the teacher promotes deeper engagement with the material. The variation in responses indicates that some students need more targeted questioning techniques to improve their analytical skills regarding discussion topics.

Furthermore, students generally identify conclusions and implications from discussions. However, linking these conclusions to broader contexts can be a challenge for some students. Other findings emphasize that understanding conclusions and their implications is crucial for connecting specific conclusions to broader contexts, which reflects advanced critical thinking. The findings suggest that while students can conclude, they need additional practice in relating these conclusions to broader implications and real-world contexts.

Most students demonstrate critical thinking about their positions and reflect on and revise their views based on group discussions. This self-reflection is essential for developing a nuanced understanding of personal viewpoints. The ability to assess and adjust one's position indicates that students engage deeply with the discussion material. However, ongoing support is necessary to help all students maintain a critical perspective throughout their discussions.

Students often struggle to conclude discussions objectively due to time constraints or a lack of clarity in summarizing key points. Drawing objective conclusions is important for consolidating learning and achieving clear outcomes. The difficulty some students face in reaching objective conclusions highlights the need for better time management and structured

guidance. Improving these aspects helps students synthesize and summarize discussions more effectively.

Based on the observations, the research concludes that the teacher at SMA N 1 Tigo Nagari effectively uses group discussion strategies to enhance students' critical thinking skills in English. The teacher carefully prepares by selecting relevant themes and employing open-ended questions, which fosters critical engagement and dynamic discussions. While most students excel in identifying assumptions, and arguments, and evaluating evidence, they need additional support in linking conclusions to broader contexts, critical self-reflection, and drawing objective conclusions. The findings show that while the strategy is largely successful, improvements in time management and targeted questioning further strengthen students' critical thinking abilities and ensure more effective discussion outcomes.

Results from field notes and observations demonstrate how well SMA N 1 Tigo Nagari instructors use group discussion techniques to help students improve their critical thinking abilities when teaching English. For talks to be successful, teacher preparation, facilitation strategies, and flexibility are essential. This method was highly received by the students, many of whom showed evidence of critical thinking through active participation, study of many viewpoints, and participation in group learning with peers. There are, however, several difficulties, particularly in guaranteeing that every student participates equally.

These results imply that group discussions can be an effective strategy for helping students enhance their critical thinking abilities if they are led by skilled facilitators Wang and Seepho (2017). For this method to be successful, the teacher must facilitate discussions, offer feedback, and foster a positive learning environment. The findings of this study emphasize how crucial it is to provide continuing assistance and make adjustments to meet the various needs of students to create an atmosphere where critical thinking can thrive.

KESIMPULAN

Based on the research findings and conclusions that have been described, several suggestions that can be given are as follows. Schools that implement the Merdeka Curriculum should consider widely adopting group discussion strategies in teaching English. This approach can help students develop critical thinking skills and important social skills. Schools and governments need to develop comprehensive teacher training programs to improve teachers' skills in facilitating group discussions. This training should include practical techniques, effective use of evaluation tools, and strategies to encourage student participation. Further research is needed to examine the effectiveness of group discussion strategies in various contexts and with wider samples. Long-term research is also needed to evaluate the long-term impact of these strategies on students' critical thinking skills. Schools need to increase support and resources for holding group discussions. This includes providing appropriate teaching materials, supportive classrooms, and appropriate evaluation tools.

This research aims to explore the effectiveness of group discussion strategies in developing students' critical thinking skills in teaching English as part of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Based on the findings outlined in the previous chapter, several main conclusions can be drawn. Group discussion strategies have been proven to be able to improve students' critical thinking skills. Students who are involved in discussions show better abilities in asking critical questions, providing logical reasons, and thinking deeply about the subject matter. Group discussions increase the active participation of students.

Therefore, Students become more enthusiastic and involved in the learning process when they are allowed to discuss and express their opinions. Students who are active in group discussions show a better

understanding of the lesson material. Group discussions help students relate the material studied to real contexts in everyday life. Group discussions also help develop students' social skills, such as the ability to work together, communicate, and respect other people's opinions. Implementation of group discussion strategies supports the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes student-centered learning and the development of 21st-century skills. This strategy allows students to take an active role in their learning.

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