

Strategies To Improve The Quality Of Learning Towards Critical Thinking Skills In Students Of Smp Negeri 24 Makassar

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Abstract

This study aims to explore learning strategies that can improve the quality of the learning process in order to develop critical thinking skills in students. Using a qualitative approach, this study was conducted through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies of teachers and students at the secondary school level. The main focus of the study was the identification of effective pedagogical practices, as well as supporting and inhibiting factors in implementing these strategies in the classroom. The results of the study indicate that the implementation of active learning strategies such as group discussions, problem-based learning, and the use of open-ended questions consistently can increase student engagement and encourage them to think critically. In addition, the role of teachers as facilitators and creators of learning environments that support open dialogue is the key to success in this process. This study recommends professional development for teachers in designing learning strategies that emphasize strengthening students' critical thinking skills.

Keywords: learning strategies, critical thinking, learning quality, qualitative approach, students

INTRODUCTION

A positive environment or close relationship between teachers and students is needed for the teaching and learning process to take place in the classroom. This is intended to encourage

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active communication during the teaching and learning process and help everyone understand each other's roles, responsibilities, and goals. In this context, the role of the teacher as a facilitator is very important to ensure that students receive learning experiences that meet their needs and skills and encourage active involvement.

Education is one of the most important aspects of human life. However, many countries still have difficulty in improving education standards, especially in helping students hone their critical thinking skills. According to a UNESCO study, only 50% of students in the world have adequate critical thinking skills. This problem is also relevant in Indonesia. According to the 2018 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), Indonesia ranked 73 out of 78 countries in terms of students' critical thinking skills. This shows that there is still a lot of work that Indonesia needs to do to improve education standards and develop students' critical thinking skills.

Learning is part of education. All activities, procedures, or approaches carried out by humans as living beings to gain knowledge are called learning (Syafrin et al., 2023). Transferring knowledge from teachers to students to foster deeper understanding is another aspect of learning. Learning achievement will be achieved if educators, students, and the environment collaborate with each other (Widayanti & Slameto, 2016).

Education that prioritizes critical thinking skills not only produces intellectually intelligent individuals but also fosters analytical and creative thinkers who are ready to face the challenges of a changing world. The next generation of the nation is prepared to face the impacts of globalization and modern technological advances by learning how to think critically through education (Karen & Melva Silitonga, 2024). As is known, critical thinking is one of the advanced cognitive functions that can be used to help students build their conceptual framework. Success in profession, life, and every other aspect also depends on critical thinking skills.

As expressed by Amrain et al., (2024) that students can develop their conceptual systems by using critical thinking, high-level thinking strategies. Students need to be able to think critically to face various social and personal problems throughout their lives. Critical thinking skills are the ability to reflect and make logical choices (Nuryanti et al., 2018).

According to Nafiah, Y. N., & Suyanto (2014) Three factors, learning method variables, external factors, and internal factors have an impact on students' critical thinking skills. A person's cognitive ability, emotional intelligence, and physical health are some examples of internal traits that can affect how well they develop critical thinking. External influences include things like the student's family, environment, and school. The last element is the learning methodology that combines reflective and active techniques. Critical thinking skills are usually developed by



students who are encouraged to ask questions, analyze, and learn independently, while passive techniques emphasize active involvement, reflection, and problem solving.

Learning objectives include the development of attitudes, knowledge, and specific skills in each educational unit as stated in the Graduate Competency Standards and Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture Number 22 of 2016 concerning Elementary and Secondary Education Process Standards. Learning attitudes can be achieved through the process of "receiving, applying, appreciating, experiencing, and practicing". For learning purposes, the process of "remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating" is used. Skills are developed through the process of "observing, asking, trying, reasoning, presenting, and creating". Critical thinking skills are needed to meet the Elementary and Secondary Education Process Standards because learning tasks require the use of these skills.

The purpose of this study is to define critical thinking skills, explain the characteristics of high school students, discuss the components that influence critical thinking skills, and suggest approaches to improve learning standards. As we know, critical thinking is a high-level way of thinking. The first step in developing this ability is observation, asking questions, reasoning, evaluating other people's thoughts or statements, drawing conclusions, and reporting findings. Researching this topic is essential to identify factors that influence students' critical thinking skills, and the author will use efficient teaching strategies to help students think more clearly.

Students who want to develop their critical thinking skills must first explore the reasons and consequences of the challenges they experience before drawing unbiased conclusions. Elementary school students, especially those in the upper grades, must be accustomed to thinking critically in all aspects of their lives, including at home, at school, and while playing with their peers. Classroom learning strategies demonstrate critical thinking skills through student engagement, learning, and activities during the teaching and learning process.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach. Qualitative methods are descriptive research approaches that usually require analysis and describe a number of characteristics related to the problem and unit being investigated. This study was conducted at SMA Negeri 24 Makassar located at Jl. Baji Gau No.28 A, Bongaya, Tamalate, Makassar City, South Sulawesi. This study aims to determine the factors that influence students' thinking skills in grade XI. This study uses interviews as data collection. In order for the presentation of data to be easier to understand and analyze, information is arranged into a descriptive narrative.



RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The initial stage of this study involved observation in class XI/C of SMA 24 Makassar. The purpose of this study was to observe how junior high school students in grade XI/C of SMA 24 Makassar use critical thinking. The interview date was April 23, 2025. The main purpose of this study was to gain a comprehensive understanding of how students' critical thinking processes occur during classroom learning. Ten students participated in semi-structured interviews using open-ended questionnaires that allowed them to express their opinions freely. During the interviews, students discussed their understanding of the issue, their search for answers, their perspectives, and their reactions to information from teachers and other sources. Determining the elements that encourage or hinder students' growth in critical thinking skills is another purpose of this study. The following are the results of the documentation of interviews conducted at SMP Negeri 24 Makassar on grade XI/C students on April 23, 2025.



Figure 1. Student Interview



Figure 2. Student Interview

Based on the interview results, most students believe that critical thinking is the ability to “think deeper.” When asked to evaluate the content of an article, express an opinion during a class debate, or compare opposing viewpoints in economics class, some of them were able to provide specific examples. However, students admitted that they often struggle to express their thoughts in a clear and logical manner, especially when asked to justify a response or viewpoint. Rather than risk voicing a different view that might not be accepted by their peers or teachers, they usually feel more comfortable following the response that is generally considered appropriate.

It was also revealed during the interviews that students’ courage and critical thinking skills



were greatly influenced by their learning environment. Many students stated that when teachers allowed them to speak or respond freely without immediately blaming them if they answered incorrectly, they were more likely to think for themselves. Students' self-confidence was found to be positively impacted by an open and supportive teaching environment. On the other hand, students believed that critical thinking was "useless" in overly strict schools that only emphasized memorization or right-wrong answers because they were only expected to remember and repeat the material. The idea that teaching methods and approaches have a significant impact on whether or not students develop their critical thinking skills is a serious one.

The main obstacle in the development of critical thinking, according to the interview, is the tendency of students to adopt a passive learning style. Since the previous grade, the majority of students stated that they were more accustomed to learning through lectures and exercises, with little opportunity to discuss, ask critical questions, or analyze information. As a result, they had difficulty adjusting when placed in a learning environment that required more critical and introspective thinking. However, students reported that, as long as they received sufficient instruction and practice from the teacher, they were genuinely interested in critical thinking and felt satisfied if they were able to find their own answers or solutions. The following are the results of interviews on factors that influence critical thinking skills in grade XI/C students at SMP Negeri 24 Makassar.

First student: *"When I join a debate competition, I learn to construct arguments and find data that supports my opinion. It makes me think more deeply."*

Second student: *"Group discussions in class make me understand the material better because we exchange ideas, not just receive explanations from the teacher."*

Third student: *"My teacher often holds debates between groups, and this activity trains me to listen to other people's opinions and find their weaknesses."*

It has been proven that school activities such as debates, group discussions, and academic competitions help junior high school students strengthen their critical thinking skills. Before making a choice or voicing an idea, students must complete these tasks by analyzing data, developing arguments, and considering different points of view. This motivates students to understand and evaluate the content more thoroughly than just memorizing. Based on the results of the interviews, students stated that participating in debate and discussion competitions improved their ability to organize their thoughts methodically and logically. One student stated that participating in a debate tournament taught him how to construct an argument and find evidence to support his claims. This shows how this type of exercise can foster critical thinking



and the capacity to express opinions reasonedlly.

Group conversations in class are also considered a good way to develop critical thinking skills. Students believe that talking with friends about their beliefs helps them see things from different perspectives and makes them more receptive and accommodating to different viewpoints. Because it encourages a thoughtful and non-dogmatic mindset, this technique is essential for developing critical thinking skills.

This shows that discussion activities not only teach the courage to voice opinions, but also foster habits of independent thinking and learning. Some students also emphasized the importance of preparation before expressing their opinions, admitting that they are used to gathering information and understanding the subject matter first in order to make meaningful contributions to the discussion. There are also benefits from teacher-facilitated debates. When students are given a topic to debate, they develop high-level critical thinking skills that include constructive and evaluative processes, such as listening to their interlocutors, analyzing the weaknesses of arguments, and supporting their positions with facts.

The factors that influence critical thinking skills in research (Ariyani et al., 2024) are:

1. Classroom disruption: Some students may have a tendency to misbehave in class, such as talking during class, disturbing other students, or using cell phones inappropriately.
2. Negative attitudes: Negative attitudes that can hinder students' academic success and motivation include laziness, pessimism, and lack of self-confidence.
3. Missing assignments: If students consistently fail to complete assigned homework or projects, they may have difficulty understanding the lessons and achieving good performance on academic exams.
4. Social challenges and health and nutrition problems: Students from unstable family backgrounds or those with social problems may experience stress or disruption that interferes with their ability to learn, while students from disadvantaged family backgrounds may be more susceptible to health and nutrition problems that can affect their focus, energy, and academic performance.

Teachers use real-world issues as a backdrop to help students learn new material and hone their critical thinking and problem-solving skills. PBL, or problem-based learning, is the term for this method. It is highly recommended to use this learning model to motivate students to learn and actively participate in the educational process. As a teacher, you can assess and adjust each student's learning style based on the circumstances. In order to create a friendly and supportive learning environment for all students, educators and educational institutions must be aware of



these detrimental habits and take proactive action to change them.

DISCUSSION

Critical thinking skills are essential competencies that students must have in facing the challenges of the 21st century. However, the reality in the field shows that many learning processes are still teacher-centered, so that they provide less space for students to develop critical thinking skills. This requires a learning strategy that can improve the quality of the teaching and learning process and encourage students to actively think analytically and reflectively.

The qualitative approach in this study revealed that learning strategies such as inquiry methods and problem-based learning (PBL) are effective in improving students' critical thinking skills. Inquiry methods encourage students to ask questions, analyze data, and make arguments based on evidence, while PBL helps students analyze cases, understand causes, and find solutions, which also improves their understanding and confidence (Maylia, E.C., et al. 2024).

The role of the teacher as a facilitator is very crucial in implementing the strategy. Teachers are required to create a conducive learning environment, guide understanding of the context of the material, train problem identification, encourage questions and discussions, and guide drawing conclusions. In addition, the use of learning methods that encourage critical thinking and providing constructive feedback are also part of the teacher's role in developing students' critical thinking skills (Risandy, L.A., 2024).

However, there are several obstacles in implementing this strategy, such as limited learning time, a large number of students in one class, and an overly dense curriculum. In addition, not all teachers are ready to change their teaching approach to a more participatory and reflective direction. This requires support from schools and education policy makers in providing resources, training, and flexibility in implementing a curriculum that is more adaptive to student needs.

Considering these findings, it can be concluded that improving the quality of learning to foster students' critical thinking skills requires a planned, collaborative, and sustainable strategy. The combination of active learning methods, the role of teachers as facilitators, and a supportive learning environment are key factors in the success of developing critical thinking skills. This study provides an important contribution to educational practices in schools and is expected to be a reference for policy development and teacher training in the future.

CONCLUSION

A positive environment and close relationship between teachers and students are



necessary for an efficient teaching and learning process because both facilitate the development of active communication. Teachers act as facilitators, helping students acquire critical thinking skills, which are essential to overcome the obstacles posed by technological advances and globalization. Both external and internal factors, such as family environment and education, have an impact on critical thinking skills. Internal factors include emotional intelligence and well-being. It has been shown that these skills are enhanced through active and reflective learning strategies. Although there are still obstacles in the form of negative attitudes and passive learning practices, research at SMA Negeri 24 Makassar shows that debates and group discussions are beneficial in developing students' critical thinking skills. The development of critical thinking skills is highly dependent on a supportive classroom atmosphere and learning techniques that allow students to voice their thoughts without worrying about being wrong. In addition to teaching, teachers also have the responsibility to guide, inspire, and provide sufficient learning materials so that the learning process becomes interesting, stimulating, and enjoyable, allowing students to learn independently and critically.

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