



Critical Thinking in the Macrostructure of Policies for an English as Foreign Language Teacher Education in Indonesia

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Abstract. Previous studies revealed the lack of solid concept of critical thinking in the national policies (*National Standards of Higher Education and Indonesian Qualification Framework*). The lack of clarity has contributed to the implicit articulation of critical thinking for Pre-Service English Teachers (PSETs) in the English Language Education (ELE) Study Program, National University (pseudonym), Indonesia. This study extends the analysis of critical thinking in the other parts of the macrostructure of ELE study program, which includes an investigation of how critical thinking is articulated in the 2013 curriculum for high-school contexts and the graduate profile of the Teacher Certification Program (*PPG = Pendidikan Profesi Guru*). Interviews with 6 English Teacher Educators (ETE) who were appointed as leaders to obtain their insights about the enactment of critical thinking in the university. This study also analyses the aspects of evaluation used by the national (BAN-PT) and international accreditation (AUN-QA) bodies to assess Indonesia's higher education institutions' compliance with mandated policies. The findings confirmed that critical thinking had been explicitly stated in the 2013 curriculum as a graduate attribute for all levels of Indonesian education. Another key finding is that despite the implicit statement of critical thinking in the ELE study program's graduate attributes, the national and international accreditation results indicated that ELE study program had supported students' critical thinking development. These findings highlight that the implicit articulation of critical thinking in the policies is accepted as fulfilling the policy enactment. Thus, this study recommends future studies to investigate the practices of critical thinking in the ELE study program.

Keywords: critical thinking · macrostructure · EFL teacher education

1 Introduction

Critical thinking in the 21st century is viewed as a crucial competency to develop through all levels of education [1]–[3]. This is due to its functions as a tool of inquiry that can be used in situations that require individuals to solve a problem and make a decision [4]. Thus, many universities in China, Malaysia, and the UK have set critical thinking as an educational goal and enacted critical thinking in diverse ways [2, 5].

Thomas and Lok [6] write that critical thinking comprises skills, dispositions, and knowledge. The knowledge includes general information and basic facts to enable valid evaluation, specific content-based knowledge related to discipline-specific and contextual information; and experience, which includes intellectual development and knowledge gained from life and work experiences [6]. For this study, knowledge of specific content in Thomas and Lok [6] could be relevant to the knowledge obtained from the courses in the curriculum for Pre-Service English Teachers (PSETs), namely knowledge about English as Foreign Language (EFL) teaching. The concept of critical thinking for PSETs in this study adapts Thomas and Lok's [6] framework, which comprises skills, dispositions, and knowledge. The skills refer to abilities in analysing argument/claims/evidence [7, 8]; making inferences using inductive or deductive reasoning, judging or evaluating [8], making decisions or solving problems [9], asking and answering questions for clarification, defining terms [7], identifying assumptions [10], interpreting and explaining [8], and reasoning verbally [11]. The dispositions cover manners of open-mindedness, fair-mindedness [12] the propensity to seek reason [13], inquisitiveness, the desire to be well-informed, flexibility, respect for, and willingness to entertain, others' viewpoints [12]. Critical thinking for PSETs also considers competencies specified in the National Standard for Higher Education [14], Indonesian Qualification Framework [15], and curriculum for PSETs of National University (pseudonym) in 2015 and 2017 [16, 17].

1.1 The Context of the Study

The context of the study is the Bachelor of Arts in English Language Teaching study program at the National University (a pseudonym). The students of this program are Pre-Service English Teachers with different cultural backgrounds as they are from different Islands of Indonesia, each with a unique culture, and therefore this study need to consider whether diverse culture as a factor that might influence the way they perceive critical thinking as suggested by previous researchers [18, 19]. When the pre-service English teachers graduate from the program, they are eligible to teach EFL subject for primary and secondary schools in Indonesia.

The dominant learning culture of Indonesian education institutions is teacher centred recognizing the authority of the teacher, the passivity of the students, and a teacher centred approach, and the importance of written examinations [20]. This learning culture might hinder the students from developing their critical thinking. [19] stated that EFL college students, including pre-service English teachers, tend to accept opinions, especially on the current news without evaluating them appropriately. He argued that the reason for their lack of critical thinking was probably because their previous study at primary and secondary schools typically applied a too teacher-centred approach. While there may be other explanations, this study considers this is possibly because they did not gain sufficient learning experiences that nurtured their competency in reasoning. The PSETs during their primary and secondary education were not exposed to the activities that stimulate their critical thinking development including making 'good' judgment by analysing, synthesizing and evaluating evidence and others' opinion as these attributes were not seen as teaching goal by their teachers.

As discussed that critical thinking becomes the major learning outcome of undergraduate education in the 21st century, EFL teacher education in Indonesia is expected to nurture PSETs' critical thinking. Unfortunately, the English Teacher Educators (ETE) did not deliberately learn about the concept of critical thinking and how to incorporate critical thinking in English teaching during their undergraduate study program. Paul [21, p. 218] suggests that "teachers need a solid foundation in critical thinking skills before they can teach them". Furthermore, teachers need to have a clear conceptual understanding of critical thinking [6, 21]-[25] before they can effectively implement critical thinking strategies relevant to the subject matter. Thus, ETEs need to be empowered with the knowledge of critical thinking and how to incorporate critical thinking in their teaching [25]. If this need was previously not adequately attended to, how would English teacher educators facilitate pre-service English teachers' critical thinking development?

Previous research about critical thinking of college students majoring in English revealed their lack of critical thinking [25]. Djiwandono [26] argues that the foundation of critical thinking in Indonesian education system is not yet strong and solid. Therefore, Djiwandono [26] calls for empirical research to identify principles of how to develop critical thinking based on the Indonesian context [26] and this study will respond to his call. This study attempts to capture the conceptualisation of critical thinking in the macrostructure of EFL teacher education in National University, Indonesia, especially how critical thinking is conceptualised in the policies that govern national standard of higher education, the enactment of critical thinking in the English Language Education study program of National University, and the aspects used by regulators to evaluate quality assurance. The study is important because the findings will provide research-based principles for the enhancement of the practice of teaching critical thinking for pre-service English teachers. The findings of the study can be used as the basis of improvement of the policy for higher education institutions to explicitly enact critical thinking in the curriculum for pre-service English teachers.

2 Method

This study employs qualitative approach that involves analysis on the policy documents and interviews with 6 English Teacher Educators (ETEs) who became the leaders in 2014–2018. The investigation of the macrostructure of the ELE study program involves the analysis of policies that govern universities in constructing relevant learning outcomes of their graduates. The policies include SNPT (*Standar Nasional Pendidikan Tinggi* = National Standard of Higher Education), which is used by Indonesian Higher Education to guide curriculum construction, and KKNI (*Kerangka Kualifikasi Indonesia* = Indonesian Qualification Framework) that is used to guide educational institutions to equip students with the qualifications for both the national and international job markets [15]. The interviews with the leaders/ETEs and the PSETs were done to elicit data on their insights about the enactment of critical thinking in the National University based on their experiences. The investigation of macrostructure also covers the analysis of the regulators, namely the national and international accreditation bodies that assess Indonesia's Higher Education institutions' compliance with mandated policies from the

Ministry of Education. The other aspect of macrostructure involves the analysis of critical thinking in high-school contexts, which is the place for the PSETs to acquire their professional experience.

3 Findings and Discussions

The findings of this study capture the conceptualisation of critical thinking in the national policies and how it is enacted in the National University. Prior this study, the author has analysed the National Standard of Higher Education, Indonesia Qualification Framework, and the 2015 and 2017 curriculum for PSETs to identify the articulation of critical thinking [27]. In this study, the researcher extends the investigation to critical thinking in the regulator policy for quality assurance and the enactment of the policies from the perspectives of English Teacher Educators who were appointed as leaders.

3.1 Critical Thinking in the National Policies

Muniroh [27] reported that that critical thinking in the 2013 Curriculum has been explicitly stated as a graduate attribute for all levels of Indonesian education. However, Muniroh [27] also found an inconsistency in the explicitness of the statement about critical thinking in the policies at the undergraduate level.

3.1.1 Critical Thinking as a Graduate Attribute at the Undergraduate Level

The SNPT contains an explicit statement regarding critical thinking as an undergraduate attribute; it requires undergraduates to be “able to perform logical, critical, systematic, and innovative thinking to develop and implement knowledge and technology [...]; make effective decisions in the context of problem-solving [...]; perform self-evaluation [...].” [14, p. 65]. While the SNPT explicitly states critical thinking is a university graduate attribute, the KKNI does not explicitly state critical thinking as a graduate attribute. Instead, KKNI promotes problem-solving and decision making [15] as attributes. In regard to this, the stated attributes for the undergraduate are that the graduate is:

capable of applying science, technology and art within her/his expertise and is adaptable to various situations when problem-solving; mastering in-depth general and specific theoretical concepts of specific knowledge and capable of formulating related problem-solving procedures; capable of taking strategic decisions based on the information and data analysis and provides direction in choosing several alternatives solutions [15, p. 27].

Both KKNI and SNPT explicitly state that problem-solving and decision making should be undergraduate learning outcomes. The difference in articulating critical thinking in the SNPT and KKNI policy documents impact the enactment of the policy at the university level as the curriculum developers in the university develop their curriculum on the basis of the standards and qualifications stated in the national policies.

3.1.2 Critical Thinking in the English Teacher Certification Program

To further examine the integration of the national policy on critical thinking and its interpretation through the local university policy, the researcher also investigated the policy statement that informs the English teacher certification program (*PPG = Pendidikan Profesi Guru*). PPG is a one-year program of professional education for fresh graduates of pre-service English teacher programs and for in-service English teachers. The analysis of the policy statement in the SNPT and KKNI [27] as well as the curriculum for the PPG indicates that critical thinking is explicitly stated as one of the graduate attributes in the SNPT, in which the graduate is expected to be able to “make independent decisions in performing professional work based on logical, critical, systematic and creative thinking” [14, p. 73]. However, similar to the undergraduate level, KKNI does not explicitly include critical thinking as a qualification for graduates of professional education. The qualifications for PPG are set at level 7 of KKNI, which implicitly characterises critical thinking as a capability in problem-solving and in taking strategic decisions. The document states that a graduate should be:

capable of carrying out the planning and managing of resources under her/his responsibility and comprehensively evaluate her/his performance by using science, technology and art to establish the organisation’s strategic developmental steps; capable of solving science technology or/and art problems within her/his scientific expertise through a mono-discipline approach; capable of carrying out research and taking strategic decisions with accountability and full responsibility on all aspects under her/his domain of expertise [28, p. 27-28].

Interestingly, the curriculum outcomes for PPG explicitly state that professional English teachers are to be “capable of making professional decisions independently based on logical, critical, systematic, and creative thinking; capable of critically evaluating the working performance and decision [...]” [28, p. 7]. The curriculum for the PPG aligns with the SNPT in stating critical thinking explicitly as a professional attribute of teachers [15, 28]. This finding again strongly emphasises the need for the explicitness of critical thinking in the curriculum for the PSETs at the undergraduate level in order to mandate the PSETs’ critical thinking development in an informed way. The findings also underline the necessity of professional development for the ETEs and the leaders to reflect on and revisit their conceptualisations and practices of critical thinking in English teaching at the undergraduate level.

3.1.3 The Leaders’ Interpretation and Implementation of Critical Thinking in the National University

The curriculum for PSETs is developed based on IQF and the NSHE. The term critical thinking is not used to articulate the targeted thinking skills for pre-service English teachers. Instead, competencies that can be categorised as critical thinking based on the higher order of thinking Bloom Taxonomy [29] where terms analyse, evaluate and create/develop/design are used for development in knowledge and skill of subject matter, pedagogical, interpersonal and interpersonal [17, pp. 14–15], [27].

The Head of the English department runs two study programs, ELT (English Language Teaching), study program for the PSETs and ELL (English Language Literature), a study program for non-education students. While the curriculum for the PSETs did not use critical thinking as terms to indicate the targeted thinking competencies, the curriculum for the literature students explicitly stated critical thinking as one of the target competencies in intrapersonal/interpersonal knowledge and skills, as it is written that the graduate should “demonstrate creative-critical thinking and innovation in social and academic lives” [17, p. 23], [27].

The policy discrepancy of the national policy (NSHE and IQF) in addressing critical thinking impacts the uneven translation of the policy in the university level, especially the study program curriculum. Pungki, the faculty leader who is responsible for academic affairs explained about the autonomy of a study program in determining the curriculum. Pungki emphasised IQF as the basis of the curriculum development as she said.

The department and study program determine their curriculum. The university has conducted a workshop about IQF that include critical thinking as part of standard 6 for the bachelor degree, and the implementation is on the departments’ responsibility. I know that some departments in this university state critical thinking explicitly in their curriculum. (Pungki, interview)

Aligns to Pungki statements, Dedi, the former dean, explained the position of national policy and the university policy as follow, “The National Standard of Higher Education is the general rule; how far it is operationalised and enacted in the level of the study program, I have no idea.” (Dedi, interview).

In the department level, Yongki, the leader of the English department, admitted the reason for not putting critical thinking in the curriculum for the PSETs. Yongky thought that “critical thinking as policy is a discourse that is discussed informally, and academically in the seminar, but it has not been instructed in every teaching unit. [The reason] is because the university leaders lack critical thinking knowledge.” (Yongki, interview).

Similar to Yongki, an interview with Asep, who was the coordinator of post graduate program in English Department indicated that critical thinking in the National University is not treated as an institutional policy that is required to operationalise in every teaching unit. The integration of critical thinking within the teaching is the educators’ autonomy, as he expressed, “Critical thinking is not explicitly operationalised as the university policy, just because I never touch that area. I relate critical thinking to my teaching units. Critical thinking as a policy is written in the unit description.” (Asep, interview).

Despite the limited operationalisation of critical thinking in the curriculum for the PSETs, Pungki perceives that the curriculum has been fulfilled the national standard (NSHE) and the qualification framework (IQF). At the moment, the English department is preparing for AUN-QA (ASEAN University Network Quality Assurance), which is an international standard in the level of South East Asia. She said, “I believe the standard used by the English department is higher than IQF because the department aims the international standard, AUN-QA.” (Pungki, interview).

The guideline of AUN-QA [30, 31] regarding the target learning outcome mention high order thinking, so it is not surprising that the terms used to represent critical thinking

in IQF and the curriculum for PSETs resonance the AUN-QA as the international standard. Also, Pungki justified the quality to the curriculum for the PSETs in the national level as “it has been disseminated in the national association of English department.” (Pungki, interview).

The faculty leaders’ perception about critical thinking in the university policy shows their understanding and consideration over the policies that have been practiced in the university. Ulfa, the dean, as a policy in the university level, perceived critical thinking has been included in the university vision and mission and adequately addressed by the existing terms. Here is the excerpt from interview with Ulfa.

Critical thinking is part of character education, whether it is hidden or explicit...the most important is our mindset agree that character education is essential, that’s it! A person who has a good character In shaa Alloh is a critical thinker [...] It has been explicit in the university vision and mission [...](Ulfa)

Intelligent and religious are stated in the university vision and mission, that according to Ulfa cover the notion of critical thinking as the purpose of education in the National University.

[...] to engender graduates with academic competency, profession and/or vocation, religious and ethical character, intelligent, independent, a strong commitment in nationalism, and able to develop themselves professionally (“Visi, misi, & tujuan,” 2018)

While Ulfa viewed critical thinking from the lens of character education, Asep, the head of international office and the former leader of academic affairs, practically approaches critical thinking based on his experiences in teaching and working with other experts to make the university academic writing guidebook. He recalled.

I see the operational policy about critical thinking in the revised PPKI (PPKI = Pedoman Penulisan Karya Ilmiah = Academic writing guidebook) where I was involved. PPKI functions as a rector meta-genre rule are responsible for shaping the writing practice in the university, including a thesis in which we expect the students can achieve criticality. Critical thinking is deductively implemented through the guidebook for academic writing and inductively through the bit by bit activities, in the piece by piece process of thesis examination where the examiners, the supervisors learn from each other (about) questions that challenge critical thinking, I believe happens. (Asep)

However, Asep showed his uncertainty about the commonality between the educators in understanding PPKI from the lens of critical thinking and how they use PPKI as a reference to supervise the PSETs in writing an undergraduate thesis. He said, “I have no idea whether the educators share the same understanding about the expectation of critical thinking by using PPKI as it depends on the educators’ knowledge, beliefs and practice of critical thinking.” (Asep).

The interview with Ulfa reveals an external factor that impacts assessment in the undergraduate level, which is indirectly related to the practices of critical thinking in the assessment for the PSETs.

The ministry of research and technology for higher education issues a recruitment policy for educator applicants, [they] should have master degree with a cum laude predicate. That means no chance for the graduates without cum laude. I was shocked and this impact on our assessment, we need to be wise in giving a mark to the student, and we cannot be ideal because of the system and stakeholders. Policy always brings tensions. (Ulfa)

From the document of curriculum, the finding indicated that the curriculum developer approaches critical thinking from higher order thinking of Bloom Taxonomy [29]. Regarding the university policy, Ulfa perceived critical thinking had been included as character education in the university vision and mission. Another form of the operationalisation of critical thinking as university policy, according to Asep, is the guidebook for academic writing (PPKI). Also, Asep viewed critical thinking has been practiced through activities such as thesis writing and examination. However, the finding from this group informed an external factor that prevents the ETEs to perform an ideal assessment, while there is no shared convention about the operationalisation of critical thinking in the teaching practices among the faculty leaders and the ETEs. Therefore, Pungki perceived the significance of explicitness of critical thinking in the curriculum for study program level as the legal basis for students' development of critical thinking. She explains, "By making "critical thinking" explicit in the curriculum, it is expected that the educators will provide opportunities for critical thinking. The explicit statement is important because some educators might be sensitive toward criticism that will target critical students." (Pungki).

Pungki's statement is the representative voice from the leaders that the explicitness of critical thinking explicit in the policy would benefit both for the educators and the students in supporting the teaching of critical thinking in for the PSETs. First, because the finding indicates a necessity of critical thinking knowledge that is shared between the faculty leaders and the ETEs. Second, the finding also indicates another contextual factor that refers to ETEs' attitude towards criticism that might prevent the PSETs deliver critical arguments towards the ETEs.

3.1.4 Regulators: Assessment for ELE Study Program Quality Assurance

National Accreditation Board of Higher Education (*Badan Akreditasi Nasional Perguruan Tinggi*/ BAN-PT) is the national regulator that assesses the institutional compliance with the standards of curriculum, learning, and academic performance [32]. At the time of this study, the ELE study program held the highest accreditation status (A) granted by BAN-PT. The ELE study program was also assessed by AUN-QA (ASEAN University Network-Quality Assurance), an international regulator, to enhance its quality as the leading institution in English teacher education in Indonesia. At the time of data gathering, the department was preparing for the international accreditation of AUN-QA and was undertaking an internal review as part of its preparation for accreditation.

Referring to the standard of AUN-QA [30, 31], high-order thinking is stipulated as a graduate learning outcome. Therefore, the curriculum for the PSETs echoes the standard of AUN-QA and uses words such as *analyse, evaluate and create/develop/design* which is connected to the higher-order thinking skills found in Bloom's Taxonomy [17, 29]. The curriculum for the PSETs at the national level has been disseminated to the National Association of the English Department through an annual meeting, and other universities in Indonesia have maintained that their curriculum uses both national and international (AUN-QA) standards. The results of assessment from AUN-QA indicated that the ELE study program fulfilled the standard of AUN-QA quality assurance.

3.1.5 Critical Thinking in High School Contexts

As the goal of education for the PSETs is to prepare them to be high school EFL teachers, it is also necessary to investigate the high school curriculum. This study found that critical thinking had been included as one of the target learning outcomes for elementary and secondary education in the 2013 National Curriculum. The policy document states that the graduates of high school should "have skills in thinking and working creatively, productively, critically, independently, collaboratively, and communicatively" [32]. However, the research literature revealed contradictory phenomenon. Critical thinking is not integrated into the discourse of teaching EFL in the high schools; the teacher-centred approach is still dominant, and the learning is guided by the use of textbooks [19, 33, 34]. Despite the inclusion of critical thinking as one of the targeted competencies in the high school graduate profile [32], the teacher was not ready to incorporate critical thinking in EFL subject matter [35].

4 Conclusion

This study aims to describe the conceptualisation of critical thinking in the macrostructure of English Language Teacher Education program in an Indonesian University. The findings of the study indicated that the articulations of critical thinking in the policies of English teacher education are inconsistent with the national policies and such inconsistency seems to have brought about diverse interpretations at the university level where the policy should be effectively enacted. The inconsistency in explicating critical thinking as the university graduate attribute in the national policies impacts on the implicit statements of critical thinking in the ELE study program of the National University. However, the results of the national and international accreditation indicated that ELE study program supported students' critical thinking development. The findings also highlight that implicit practices of critical thinking are accepted as the fulfilment of the policy enactment.

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