

Elevating Critical Thinking: English Online Peer Discussion on Padlet

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Abstract

This qualitative study investigates the development of students' critical thinking skills through online English discussion learning activities on the Padlet platform. This study involved 130 respondents from non-English majors. The researchers collected data using an open questionnaire, which was then analyzed based on thematic data analysis. The study's results showed several factors that significantly impacted the improvement of students' critical thinking quality: interesting discussion topics that stimulate active discussion, time limits that encourage focused delivery of ideas, and vocabulary exposure that improves students' ability and fluency in expressing their opinions in English. More deeply, peer opinions in the discussion process are important in sharpening students' critical thinking skills. Various student perspectives enrich knowledge and deepen students' understanding of a discussion topic. The study results showed that several students who initially did not understand the discussion topic were enlightened and inspired to express their opinions after reading their peers' arguments. The language exposure presented in the discussion also strengthened students' ability to express their critical thinking. Overall, discussions through the Padlet platform created a conducive, comfortable and effective atmosphere supporting online English learning.

Keywords: Online Discussion; Critical Thinking; Padlet; English

INTRODUCTION

The increasingly connected global landscape of the 21st century demands individuals to be proficient in English to compete and gain greater opportunities in academic, professional and social fields. However, mastery of English linguistic competencies such as vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation does not guarantee the establishment of effective and meaningful communication. There is a need to master communication beyond superficial fluency that requires integrating higher-order thinking skills, especially critical thinking (Babazade, 2023). The background of this study is based on the direct correlation between critical thinking skills and the depth and breadth of discussion topics in English communication that several have reported (Saputri et al., 2022; Liang & Fung, 2021; Bağ & Gürsoy, 2021). In some situations, students have nothing to say in English discussions due to their inability to analyze and critically describe the topic being discussed.

Critical thinking greatly supports smooth communication in the context of English language acquisition, especially in the EFL domain. Communicating English as a productive skill both orally and in writing is not only about pronouncing correct sentences, correct grammar and appropriate vocabulary but also about expressing ideas and opinions so that communication can be built effectively. The ability to think critically will move students to go beyond their lower-order thinking to higher-order thinking skills that stimulate students to be able to question something, build logical arguments and present knowledgeable insights (Zhang, 2022).

When EFL students have limited critical thinking skills, they will experience obstacles in actively participating in dynamic and substantive discussions in English. Students will face obstacles in formulating their original ideas, presenting arguments and opposing viewpoints that differ from their thoughts. The obstacle of limited critical thinking skills in English communication will be marked by shallow discussion of ideas, repetitive statements and questions, and awkward silences that hinder the development of English language skills (Aouaf et al., 2023).

The “I have nothing to say” phenomenon in an English discussion is a challenge that EFL teachers increasingly encounter (Maher & King, 2022; Soltani & Tran, 2023). This condition concerns students' limitations in linguistic mastery of English and their inability to engage in critical communication. It results in limited, predictable student contributions and ultimately leads to monotonous and unengaging communication. Recent research has proven a significant relationship between critical thinking skills and successful EFL communication. Students who master critical thinking skills tend to perform more satisfactorily in English-speaking activities through their ability to express ideas, logical reasoning and systematic delivery of arguments. These academic findings reveal that the formation of critical thinking skills should not be separated and must be integrated into the design and implementation of the EFL teaching curriculum. Several studies also support this opinion by highlighting that a balanced collaboration between the instillation of critical thinking into English teaching can substantially improve learning outcomes by improving students' communicative competence in English classes (Li & Liu, 2021; Fernandes et al., 2024). Furthermore, this modern digital era has facilitated various modalities in English communication, one of which is using the Padlet platform. The platform accommodates the development of communication both synchronously and asynchronously. Several previous studies by Romadhon and Heriyawati (2023); Arouri et al., (2023) have emphasized that the Padlet platform motivates students to learn English through collaborative discussions and in-depth topic exploration. Integrating the Padlet platform into discussions in EFL classes can create a dynamic learning environment and stimulate students to go beyond mere linguistic competence and become genuinely involved in online discussions. However, no research has revealed the role of peer discussion in the success of English language acquisition through discussion and optimization of critical thinking. Therefore, this study seeks to reveal how students' critical thinking develops through online discussions on Padlet and the role of peer discussion in instilling students' critical thinking in English discussions. Two research questions will be investigated in this study, namely:

1. How did students' critical thinking develop through English online discussion on Padlet?
2. How did students' critical thinking develop through peer arguments in the English online discussion on Padlet?

METHOD

This research is a type of qualitative research. Qualitative research, according to Creswell (2013), is a systematic method for exploring social or human issues. It aims to create a detailed, comprehensive understanding by gathering in-depth perspectives from informants, expressed in their own words within their natural environments. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research investigates small samples (Sari et al., 2020). The respondents in this study were 130 non-English students who took general English classes at Sanata Dharma University Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The age range of the respondents was 18-23 years old.

The data collection technique in this study was using an open questionnaire. The data obtained in this study were in the form of phrases and sentences. The data analysis technique applied in this study used thematic analysis, one of the qualitative data methods. The researcher used the

thematic analysis procedure proposed by Nowell et al. (2017) which presents six stages of analysis, namely:

1. Familiarizing with the data
2. Formulating initial codes
3. Synthesizing themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Naming each theme
6. Writing a description of the data analysis based on the theme

Thematic analysis applied in this study is important in revealing the study's findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis allows researchers to draw connections between the findings of the themes obtained and the research formulation. Presenting themes also facilitates the presentation of comprehensive and meaningful data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The development of student's critical thinking through English online discussion on Padlet

This section presents the results of research related to the process of developing students' critical thinking, which is increased through English discussion activities carried out through the Padlet platform. Data from this study summarizes 130 student responses that describe perceptions dominated by positive responses to the development of critical thinking.

Based on 130 student responses, 126, or 96.92%, revealed significant development in their critical thinking process from online English discussion activities through Padlet. Conversely, the minority of data shows no development in their critical thinking process, as expressed by four students (3.08%).

The data in Table 1 reveals four factors that contribute to improving students' critical thinking skills. The first factor is an interesting topic. A large number of students, with 98 responses, indicated that interesting discussion topics stimulate students' critical thinking. This highlights that the quality of discussion topic selection has a major impact on the process of forming students' cognitive processes in critical thinking.

The second factor that contributes to the development of students' critical thinking processes is the existence of time constraints. The 10-minute time limit urges students to think quickly and express their opinions on the given topic. Twelve students acknowledged this condition as a factor that improved their critical thinking skills through the provision of limited time allocation.

The third factor is that the discussion forum on Pallet supports students in honing critical thinking skills by providing a comfortable atmosphere for expressing opinions in English discussions through the Pallet platform. This sense of comfort accommodates students in expressing their opinions and engaging in critical thinking on the given discussion topic.

The fourth factor is the Vocabulary stimulator. Students expressed that the vocabulary they understood as new knowledge through the online English discussion process supported them in expressing their critical thinking. Increasing vocabulary insight supports students in developing critical thinking processes through the English discussion process on the pallet platform.

The results of the data in this study indicate that English discussions carried out online through the Padlet platform can support the development of student's critical thinking through four

factors, namely: the quality of interesting topics, time limits that urge students' critical thinking, comfort in expressing opinions, and additional vocabulary insight in supporting the presentation of their critical ideas in English.

Table 1. Students' Critical Thinking Development through Padlet Online Discussion

| Theme | Frequency | Selected student's excerpt |
|------------------------------------|-----------|--|
| Interesting topics | 98 | Greatly increased because there is a lot of knowledge or news that attracts the brain to respond to critical thinking. |
| Time limitation | 12 | Because I was required to be able to comment in a relatively short time, namely 10 minutes, from that I learned to think quickly and according to context. |
| Comfortable place to share opinion | 10 | Because having a discussion forum via Padlet makes me feel happy, because I can express my opinion even if it is not perfect. |
| Vocabulary stimulator | 6 | Because for me this discussion can encourage me to study and also increase my English vocabulary. |

Students' critical thinking was developed through peer arguments in the English online discussion on Padlet.

This section highlights the study's findings related to students' critical thinking skills increasing through the impact of peer arguments presented in the English discussion process via the Padlet platform. This study summarizes 130 student responses, most of which 127 (97.69%) admitted that the development of their critical thinking was greatly influenced by peer arguments. Meanwhile, three students (2.31%) stated that they did not feel the impact on their critical thinking from the arguments of their peers that they read.

Table 2 presents a more detailed investigation of the factors that influence the improvement of students' critical thinking skills through peer arguments. Table 2 shows that there are three factors that influence this process. The first factor is inspiration from unfamiliarity. Most of the student responses, namely 84 students, highlighted that the opinions expressed by their peers enriched their insights and honed their critical thinking skills. The differences and variations in the students' arguments in the English discussion process showed diverse perspectives, thus broadening students' insights into seeing a topic from different sides. This has a significant impact on sharpening their critical thinking skills.

Furthermore, some of the students, namely 34 students, indicated that arguments from peers contributed to inspiring students who previously knew nothing about the topic being discussed. This shows that students get a new perspective on concepts they previously did not understand. After reading arguments from peers, the students are enlightened and understand the topic of the issue being discussed.

The third factor, as expressed by nine students, emphasized that the opinions of their peers enriched their insight into language exposure, be it grammar, vocabulary and other English elements. This indicates that the variety of linguistic elements that appear in peer arguments

help students formulate their ideas. This brings enlightenment and support to presenting critical thinking in English.

The three factors that are the results of the data in this section show a significant impact of peer arguments in the English discussion process in sharpening students' critical thinking skills. These factors create a conducive environment through the encouragement of a variety of ideas from various student perspectives, enlightenment of understanding through peer ideas conveyed in the discussion room, and exposure to language elements facilitating students' expressing their critical thinking.

Table 2. Students' Critical Thinking Development through Peer Arguments

| Theme | Frequency | Selected student's excerpt |
|--|-----------|---|
| Difference & variation enrich my knowledge | 84 | Everyone's opinion is different. Some of their opinions are the same and some are different. From there, I learned from a different perspective that I didn't even believe I would see. |
| Inspire me who knows nothing from zero | 34 | Because when I was confused about the image used for the discussion, I looked at my friends' answers to find out what the image meant. |
| Language exposure as example & inspiration | 9 | Because every input from friends, maybe I just know about the language, so there I can increase my vocabulary and I sometimes think about how to refute it. |

Discussion

The investigation results in this study revealed significant progress felt by students in their critical thinking process through online discussion activities using the Padlet platform. 96.92% of students acknowledged that these skills increased. This finding aligns with previous studies stating that discussions with peers can improve problem-solving skills and stimulate critical thinking (Yang et al., 2021; Tathahira, 2020).

A deeper analysis shows the crucial role of presenting interesting topics in the discussion process, which stimulates students' activeness in critical thinking. In this case, several previous studies strengthen these findings by stating that the relevance of topics to students' interests can increase student participation in discussions and improve the cognitive processes of students in reference English classes.

Another factor that supports students' critical thinking process is the time limit, which encourages students to provide quick responses to hone their critical thinking skills under limited time pressure. This study's findings align with language teaching strategies that recommend time management in discussions to stimulate students to be actively involved and critical (Thanasi-Boçe, 2021). Moreover, previous research conducted by Tathahira (2020) highlighted that the existence of time limits in the discussion process stimulates the production of compelling and concise arguments and hones higher analytical skills.

The comfort factor offered by the Padlet platform is another supporting factor in improving students' critical thinking skills. Students who feel comfortable expressing their ideas are crucial in encouraging openness and involvement in students' cognitive processes in online English discussions. Previous studies support this, reporting that the atmosphere of comfortable and well-structured online discussions accommodates student participation, thereby increasing their

critical reflection and expression (Al-Husban, 2020; Lunney et al., 2008; Aloni & Harrington, 2018).

Furthermore, the fourth factor that supports the improvement of students' critical cognition is the acquisition of new vocabulary through the English discussion process. Discussion of an issue in English provides students with exposure to new vocabulary, which has a significant impact on helping them express critical ideas in the English discussion process (Nakayama et al., 2023). Linguistic exposure is a crucial element of language proficiency and improving the quality of students' cognitive processes in online discussion activities using English (Snyder & Wiles, 2015; Al-Husban, 2020).

Contribution of arguments from peers facilitates the process of developing students' critical thinking skills. 97.69% of students admitted that the opinions expressed by their peers enriched their knowledge and stimulated their critical thinking skills. Exposure to diverse ideas broadens students' horizons and enhances their analytical understanding of the topics being discussed in the English discussion process. This aligns with previous research, which underlines that peer interaction stimulates critical thinking processes (Yang et al., 2021). The dynamics of the exchange of views and ideas navigate diverse conceptual frameworks and enrich students' perspectives in responding to a particular problematic topic (Behar-Horenstein & Niu, 2011). This proves the transformative role of peer ideas in honing students' critical thinking.

Various factors revealed from the research analysis highlight the effectiveness of online English discussion activities through the Padlet platform and the role of peer argument contributions in developing students' cognitive abilities. This form of learning activity not only facilitates the formation of critical thinking but also promotes collaborative learning to support student success in an increasingly complex educational landscape.

CONCLUSION

This study explores the improvement of students' critical thinking quality achieved through English learning activities through discussions on the Padlet platform. The results of this study highlight that several dominant determinants influence students to think critically. These factors include the quality of interesting discussion topics that stimulate student activity, the time limit given so that it challenges students to provide ideas and responses effectively and efficiently, a comfortable discussion atmosphere that encourages the delivery of ideas openly, and linguistic exposure, especially vocabulary in improving students' language skills in expressing their opinions. In addition to these factors, peer arguments also significantly sharpen students' critical thinking. Various student opinions with diverse points of view are presented in the discussion process, thus deepening each student's perspective and stimulating more profound reflection. Several students who initially had a limited understanding of a discussion topic were inspired to express their opinions from the exposure of their peers' arguments. In addition, the communication expressions used by peers in the discussion process expand students' vocabulary and linguistic insights, thereby helping students to articulate their thoughts through better exposure to the language of their peers. In general, the conclusion of this study underlines that the English discussion process on the Padlet platform effectively stimulates and improves students' critical thinking. In addition, the activity also accommodates the development of collaborative learning and the involvement of critical thinking and provides linguistic exposure in the English learning process. Recommendations for future research are to conduct comparative studies involving various digital platforms in this era of technology-based teaching. This is expected to enrich more comprehensive insights into the effectiveness of learning environments with the support of technology platforms.

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