

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study as stated in Chapter 1 is to investigate the strategies and techniques employed by the teacher in using the prescribed literary texts to develop critical thinking skills among students. Students' responses to the questionnaire, and the strategies and techniques employed by the teacher as recorded in a class observation sheet were analyzed and the discussion on the findings are presented in this chapter. The research questions raised in this study are discussed below.

5.1.1 Research Question 1

What strategies and techniques are employed by the teacher in the literature classroom to provide opportunities for critical responses from the students?

The teaching strategies and techniques used in the three lessons by the three different teachers were pair work, group work, individual presentations, question-answer technique, mainly of the literal level order 'WH' questions. This is coherent to Wilson's (1988) belief that a successful literature lesson falls back upon responding to the text through a variety of strategies.

In the lesson involving students of above average English proficiency level, the students confidently participated in the activities with some prompting and cues given by the teacher. It was also found that in the lessons involving students of average and below average level of proficiency, activities set were not challenging enough for students to use their critical thinking skills, thus limiting the opportunities for deep critical thinking. Charnot (1995) has described in his framework for developing thinking among students in a language classroom that teachers need to set challenging activities. Open-ended questions were seldom asked during the lessons as they require high-order inferential skills. The literature lessons were similar to normal reading comprehension lessons that basically require the students to work on content questions in pairs or groups.

The strategies and techniques used by the teachers in providing opportunities for critical responses from students revealed that the teaching strategies and techniques did not fully provide room for critical thinking to take place among the students involved in this study. Teachers seldom resorted to questioning techniques which would initiate students to respond critically.

Open-ended questions are less used in the literature class which could have been an effective technique in eliciting critical responses from

students. Beyer & Costa (1985) say that open-ended questions encourage students to think without the fear of giving the “wrong” answer. Strategies like group work and debates are confined to students who have above average level of proficiency.

Hence, it can be concluded that the strategies and techniques used by the teachers did not satisfactorily provide enough opportunities in eliciting critical responses from students as they were mostly ‘Yes’-‘No’ questions. On the other hand, Bloom (1976) has stressed that teachers should avoid asking “Yes” and “No” questions as students tend to give an answer in haste. However, some of the strategies have caused the students to think critically when strategies like discussions and debates were used. The debate session did create opportunities for critical thinking as the questions raised during the session required the students to present logical opinions and defend their opinions. Blooms (1976) has also indicated that group discussions and debates are activities which requires evaluation, which is the highest level of the Bloom’s Taxonomy. Kindsvatter, (1992) supports Bloom’s opinion that if a debate session is carried out in class, then critical thinking is evident.

In brief, the strategies and techniques employed by the teacher, most of the time, provided opportunities for critical thinking skills such as presenting information and logical thinking. Therefore, strategies and techniques

employed by the teacher need to be focused on gearing students to go beyond the text in giving responses.

5.1.2 Research Question 2

Which strategy and technique employed by the teacher greatly encourages critical thinking among the students in a literature class?

In all the three locations (Location 1, 2 and 3), the question-answer technique appears to be effective for full student participation such as presenting opinions, presenting logical opinions, visualizing, gathering information, and elaborating. Students tend to respond quickly and actively if the teacher asks a question and expects a response. This is clearly seen in the lesson involving students with below average level of proficiency (Location 3). The teacher resorted to question-answer technique which proved to be effective. Furthermore, a picture stimulus aided the teacher in drawing responses from the students. The use of a diagram or picture is an indication of the comprehension level of Bloom's Taxonomy which is at a lower level. Besides that, Keefe & Walberg (1992) point out that visual aid in a literature classroom can encourage ongoing attention to critical thinking. Comparatively, group work and pair work strategies have clearly shown to be effective among students who belong to above average and average levels of language proficiency. There was active participation since the tasks set were group discussion,

preparing for a debate and presenting interpretation. Therefore, the tasks set play an important role in allowing students to be actively involved in using their thinking skills. Students are confident in responding if the teachers give them a cue during a question-answer session as they are able to focus their responses to the question.

In addition, students are comfortable working in groups or pairs as the teacher gives them the freedom and time to express themselves freely to their peers and exchange views without the teacher listening to their exchanges all the time. Any response from a representative is the group's collective response. This is seen as a hallmark of teaching for critical thinking as stated by Beyer & Costa (1985).

In brief, an effective strategy to get the students actively involved in critical thinking is group work and pair work. The technique of question-answer (WH questions) has proven to be effective in eliciting critical thinking responses and drawing on student's prior knowledge from which information can be analyzed and interpreted as described by Grawith & Woolfolk (1991).

5.1.3 Research Question 3

What are the factors that influence the students' responses to critical thinking strategies and techniques employed by the teacher in a literature class?

Based on the data obtained from the students' questionnaires and the lesson observation sheets, the factors that have influenced the students' responses to critical thinking strategies and techniques by the teacher in a literature class are mainly: the level of English Language proficiency among students and the varied challenging activities like debates, pair work, individual presentation that develop critical thinking.

The linguistic proficiency of students influence them in terms of the expression of personal thoughts and ideas during and after the tasks are set. A majority of the students who belong to the below average proficiency level were not able to express their original thoughts after a task but instead, they imitated the responses given by their peers. A number of students responded in Bahasa Melayu using phrases and words to replace the English equivalent. On the other hand, students who belong to the above average and average level of proficiency tend to respond confidently in expressing views and opinions after a task has been set. Furthermore, students' with a high level of proficiency are able to

participate in debate sessions which require interpretation and reasoning skills.

Varied activities and tasks which are based on critical thinking skills has great influence on the effectiveness of a lesson. Teaching strategies used in the lessons tend to be a more of question-answer (teacher-student) strategy and is not fully exploited in leading into critical thinking as seen in Lessons 2 and 3. In Lesson 1, more varied strategies like debate and individual presentation were seen. The strategies used in Lesson 2 and 3 are of lower-level order in terms of critical thinking. In this lesson, simple question-answer technique was used to make the literary text easily understood and this encouraged the students to move from a lower level to higher level of understanding the text and be involved in using different levels of critical thinking skills.

5.2 Summary

The findings of the research is summarized as below:

1. Students can be led to respond to critical thinking tasks if teachers use effective questioning techniques.
2. The simple question-answer technique at the beginning of a literature lesson could lead students into a higher level of thinking skills.

3. An effective technique in developing critical thinking skill is by posing open-ended questions.
4. The language proficiency level of students influences them in terms of giving personal responses to tasks that require critical thinking.
5. Varied strategies employed by the teacher like debates, individual presentations, pair work encourage active critical thinking amongst students.

5.3 Implications and Recommendations for Further Research

The results of this study reflect teaching and learning strategies of teachers and students in a literature class. Hence an important implication of this study is that the students' expectations and interests do play a role in students' responses to critical thinking activities and tasks conducted in class. The level of linguistic proficiency of students needs to be taken into account before related activities are carried out. Simplified versions of the literary texts need to be given to students who have low linguistic competency. It is suggested that teachers avoid asking questions that only test memory and comprehension which are basically literal-level

comprehension skills. More open-ended questions which require students to analyze, evaluate, infer and to give ideas and opinions can be included as part of developing students' thinking skills. The failure to realize the importance of student competence and ability to comprehend literature in general is likely to result in the inability to instill appreciation among the students towards literary study. In relation to this, the results of the study could provide insights for teachers to include strategies and techniques that would encompass critical thinking skills in order to develop students' confidence in giving personal responses to the literary text used. Teachers can include selected and appropriate literal and open-ended questions so as to develop interest in reading literary texts and getting students involved in the activities set as the objectives in the literature syllabus set for Secondary schools which emphasize students' personal development and character building.

The literature syllabus for secondary schools also aims to broaden students' outlook of other cultures and draw valuable moral values from the prescribed literary texts. Thus, more lessons set on various literary texts need to be administered to a wider sample involving more students of different levels of language proficiency in order to obtain a better perception of students' abilities to answer critical thinking skills questions and their personal responses towards literary texts.

In addition, such studies should be extended to lower secondary students (Forms 1, 2, 3) so that a comparison can be made between the lower and upper secondary students' use of critical thinking skills in their literature lessons.

A survey on teachers' awareness of teaching strategies and techniques used in developing students' critical thinking skills can be carried out in more schools for a longer duration by having follow-up lessons on the same literary texts. Specially planned lessons by the researcher which focus on strategies and techniques intended to develop critical thinking skills can be carried out to see the effectiveness of such lessons amongst students at various levels of language proficiency. This would give a clearer picture as to where the problem actually lies: with students or teachers' strategies.