

# CHAPTER 1

## 1.0 Introduction

In a report in *The Star*, Feb.26, 1998 issue, the Minister of Education stated that education should prepare children to cope with changes rather than become dependent on habits. The Minister is of the opinion that education for the future should place less emphasis on acquiring knowledge that is transient and focus instead on developing creative and thinking minds. (*The Star*, Feb, 26, 1998)

With reference to the above opinion, the pursuit of education should not only focus on the seeking of knowledge but also take into consideration the importance of inculcating thinking among the young minds of the future Malaysian generation. This opinion also signals to teachers the importance of preparing thinking minds amongst students of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. According to Confucius, 'learning without thought is labour lost and thought without learning is perilous'.

It is completely a waste of time if no thinking takes place during learning because whatever knowledge is learnt today may be forgotten in the years to come. If, during learning thinking takes place critically, then this would enable a student to conceptualize the piece of knowledge. This would in turn be in his memory for many more years to come. Since education is a life-long process, we need critical thinking skills in order to select information from the huge corpus that is available to us.

To bring about this change, it is necessary to train teachers who are not only competent in knowledge and skills, but also those who can integrate thinking skills into their teaching. This would create a new generation of students who could be independent in their thinking. Ultimately, the country would benefit greatly from this new generation for progress and prosperity.

In order to achieve the above-mentioned goals, a component called World Studies (WS) was introduced for the first time to a group of Matriculation students in Maktab Perguruan Ilmu Khas, (MPIK). These students in the Matriculation programme pursued this course for a period of two years. WS is essentially an inquiry based subject which cuts across subjects in the educational curriculum and draws into its components various topics and themes from disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, history, geography, politics, economics and science.

The WS syllabus of the Matriculation programme takes a multi-disciplinary approach with topics that focus on a number of themes related to conflict, modernization, industrialization, and the environment. In the first year the syllabus focuses on people and conflict, while in the second year students work on issues related to modernization, industrialization and environment.

The syllabus encourages students not to think about the contemporary world as a simple system. It is hoped that students would be able to take global, natural and local

perspectives of the topic that will be dealt with. This would in future enable them to understand the complex world they live in.

The objectives of this course which are explicitly outlined in the course handbook (1995-1997) are as follows:

- i) to develop analytical and critical thinking.
- ii) to encourage students to read widely from newspapers, journals and other relevant materials.
- iii) to develop information gathering skills.

The first objective that is to develop analytical and critical thinking as stipulated in the course handbook, is the main focus of this study.

### 1.1 Operational Definitions

**WS – World Studies** - a component with a multi-disciplinary approach. This component is a core subject for the MPIK/UK Matriculation programme students.

**MPIK/UK – Maktab Perguruan Ilmu Khas, United Kingdom Matriculation programme.**

**CT – Critical thinking** is a disciplined thinking process: conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing and evaluating information gathered from, or generated by observation, experience, reflection, reasoning or communication.

**Matriculation Students** – Students who have completed the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) examination and who possess a grade one and a distinction in the English Language examination paper at the SPM level.

**WS Examination Items** – At the end of Year Two, the students would sit for an examination, and WS is one of the three papers that the students would take.

**Evaluation** - the systematic process of collecting and analyzing data in order to determine to what degree, the objectives of a programme have been or are being, achieved.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

Apart from improving English Language proficiency and Literature in English, the matriculation students are exposed to critical thinking skills through the WS component. The focus of the study is to find out if the students have developed critical thinking skills as outlined in the WS course objectives.

## **1.3 Rationale of the Study**

Teaching and writing WS Examination items need tremendous effort and time on the part of the teaching team. This is because the tutors have to incorporate critical thinking (CT) into their teaching and when writing test items for this component. The tutors may find it much easier to teach the course than to write the test. This study aims to find out the students perceptions of the CT skills having undergone the CT skills course of the WS programme. It also aims to find out whether the strategies employed by the tutors during the course had contributed towards the development of critical thinking among the students. Furthermore the study also seeks to find out if the course assessment measured

critical thinking skills and if there is a correlation between students' perception of their CT skills and their performance in the final examination.

This study could, in a small way, provide an insight to teachers, who may want to include CT in their classrooms.

#### 1.4 Research Questions

The study intends to answer the following research questions:

- 1.4.1 To find out students' perceptions of their critical thinking skills, having undergone the critical thinking course of The World Studies programme.
- 1.4.2 To find out tutors' perceptions of whether the strategies they had employed during this course had contributed to the development of critical thinking skills among the students.
- 1.4.3 To examine to what extent the assessment of the WS course measures critical thinking skills.
- 1.4.4 To find out whether there is a correlation between students' perceptions of their critical thinking skills and their performance in the final examination.

#### 1.5 Significance of the Study

The findings of this study would give an insight to teachers in the teaching of thinking, more specifically, incorporating CT in their daily teaching. It would also help

teachers to adopt specific strategies to develop critical thinking amongst students. Further, it may help in the process of writing test items that include the element of CT. The study intends to provide guidelines to teachers in their classroom practice and provide an insight on the theoretical and practical implications involved in teaching critical thinking to their students.

### 1.6 Limitations of the Study

The study is exclusively based on the matriculation students of Maktab Perguruan Ilmu Khas (MPIK), hence, it would focus on the situations in this college and the findings would not reflect situations in other colleges or institutions

The study is very much based on two sets of questionnaires, the examination questions from 1995 – 1998 and the 1998 final examination scores of the students. As such, the study depends solely on the evidence provided by the respondents.

However, the above-mentioned setback could have been overcome if a pre-test had been given to students before they pursued the WS course. This test could indicate the entry level of the students' ability to think critically. After having pursued the WS course, a post- test could have been given in order to determine the extent the course had enhanced critical thinking skills among the students.