

TEACHERS IN IMPLEMENTING GROUP DISCUSSION METHOD TO IMPROVE CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS OF FIFTH GRADE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstrak - Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui pengaruh metode diskusi terhadap kemampuan berpikir kritis siswa dalam pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris. Latar belakang penelitian ini didasarkan pada rendahnya partisipasi aktif dan kemampuan berpikir kritis siswa dalam pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris yang masih didominasi oleh metode konvensional. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode eksperimen semu (quasi-experimental) dengan desain Nonequivalent Control Group Design. Subjek penelitian terdiri dari 20 siswa kelas V SDN 8 Payung. Instrumen penelitian meliputi tes berpikir kritis, lembar observasi aktivitas siswa, dan dokumentasi hasil diskusi. Analisis data dilakukan secara kuantitatif (deskriptif dan uji-t) serta kualitatif (deskriptif naratif). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penerapan metode diskusi memiliki pengaruh signifikan terhadap peningkatan kemampuan berpikir kritis siswa. Nilai rata-rata pretest siswa sebesar 58,3 meningkat menjadi 81,2 pada posttest, dengan gain score rata-rata 22,9. Berdasarkan hasil observasi, sebanyak 85% siswa aktif berpartisipasi dalam diskusi, menyampaikan pendapat, serta mampu menyusun kesimpulan yang logis.

Kata kunci: metode diskusi, kemampuan berpikir kritis, pembelajaran bahasa Inggris, partisipasi siswa.

Abstract - This study aims to examine the effect of the discussion method on students' critical thinking skills in English language learning. The background of the study is based on the low level of active participation and critical thinking skills in English classes, which are still dominated by conventional teaching methods. This research employed a quasi-experimental method with a Nonequivalent Control Group Design. The subjects consisted of 20 fifth-grade students at SDN 8 Payung. The research instruments included a critical thinking test, observation sheets of students' learning activities, and documentation of discussion results. The data were analyzed quantitatively (descriptive and t-test) and qualitatively (narrative description). The findings reveal that the application of the discussion method significantly improved students' critical thinking skills. The average pretest score was 58.3, which increased to 81.2 in the posttest, with an average gain score of 22.9. Observation results showed that 85% of students actively participated in group discussions, expressed opinions, and drew logical conclusions.

Keywords: discussion method, critical thinking, English learning, student participation

1. INTRODUCTION

Education plays a crucial role in shaping intelligent, healthy, and well-characterized individuals (L. . Sari & Ningsih, 2023; Arif et al., 2018) . Through education, a person not only acquires academic knowledge and skills but also develops moral, social, and emotional values that form the foundation of national character (Saragi & Nugrahanta, 2023). In the context of education in Indonesia, various innovations have been continuously implemented to improve the quality of learning and prepare a young generation capable of competing in a rapidly changing global era. The government and educators have sought to implement curricula relevant to the needs of the 21st century, in which critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication are key competencies that must be developed from an early age. In 21st-century learning, teachers are no longer positioned as the sole source of knowledge, but rather as facilitators who create active and interactive learning environments (Sudana et al., 2023). Students are expected to take an active role in the learning process, to express opinions, analyze problems, and find solutions through interaction and cooperation. One of the most essential competencies to be developed in students is critical thinking ability

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(Saphira & Prahani, 2022). This ability not only helps students understand learning materials but also trains them to think logically, rationally, and analytically in facing various real-life situations.

In English language learning, critical thinking skills hold a particularly strategic role. English, as an international language, is learned not only for communicative purposes but also as a tool for thinking and expressing ideas (Carter, 2023; Syarifudin, 2023; Al Ayub Ahmed et al., 2022). Students with strong critical thinking abilities can better understand textual meaning, identify key information, analyze grammatical structures, and construct sentences and arguments logically. Thus, mastery of English should not merely rely on memorizing vocabulary and grammatical rules, but also on the ability to interpret contexts, formulate opinions, and communicate ideas with coherent reasoning (Sari & Wardhani, 2020; Anwer et al., 2018; Ferdaus & Novita, 2023).

However, in reality, English teaching at the elementary school level in Indonesia is still largely dominated by a teacher-centered approach (Harmer, 2017). Teachers often employ lecture-based and written-drill methods that do not actively involve students in the process of thinking and discussion. As a result, students tend to become passive listeners and are rarely given opportunities to explore their ideas or participate in classroom interactions. This condition contributes to low learning motivation, creativity, and critical thinking ability. Many students struggle to connect learning materials with real-life contexts, hesitate to express opinions in English, and fear making mistakes when speaking. These issues highlight the need for innovation in English language teaching strategies at the elementary school level (Redjeki & Muhajir, 2020; Crystal, 2018). Teachers, as the key agents of educational practice, must implement methods that foster active participation, confidence, and collaborative learning among students. One effective method for developing critical thinking and communication skills is the group discussion method (Fanani & Ma'u, 2018).

The group discussion method provides students with opportunities to exchange ideas, express opinions, and analyze linguistic issues collectively (Wulandari, 2020). Through this activity, students are not only listening to teachers' explanations but also actively engaging in reasoning, argumentation, and joint problem-solving. This method supports the development of higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) such as analyzing sentence structures, interpreting meanings, and formulating logical arguments and solutions to language-related problems (Fanani & Ma'u, 2018; Hamidah et al., 2020). Moreover, it naturally enhances students' speaking and listening skills, as they learn to communicate and interact with their peers in English.

Group discussions in English learning also help cultivate self-confidence and teamwork skills (Rosadi et al., 2020). When students participate in discussions, they learn to respect different opinions, articulate their own ideas, and take responsibility for group outcomes. Such a collaborative environment fosters a positive and enjoyable learning atmosphere, strengthens students' motivation, and develops their social and emotional competencies (Ehsan et al., 2019; Haq, 2024; Zulkifli et al., 2022).

Based on preliminary observations conducted at SDN 8 Payung, it was found that fifth-grade students still demonstrated low participation in English learning activities. Most students were passive, rarely asked questions, and seldom responded to the teacher's explanations. Teachers tended to dominate classroom activities, while students merely acted as recipients of information. This situation contributed to the lack of students' critical thinking ability and confidence in using English to communicate.

Previous studies have also demonstrated that the implementation of the discussion method can significantly improve learning outcomes and student engagement. For instance, research conducted by Sukriyah & Agustina (2019) and Wardhani et al. (2022), revealed that group discussions effectively enhanced students' motivation, creativity, and critical thinking in various subjects. In the context of language learning, this method has been shown to promote deeper understanding of meaning and context through meaningful social interaction.

Based on these considerations, this study focuses on the implementation of the group discussion method in English learning to enhance the critical thinking skills of fifth-grade students at SDN 8 Payung. Through this research, it is expected that a deeper understanding will be gained regarding the effectiveness of discussion methods in fostering critical thinking, improving student participation, and creating an engaging and interactive classroom atmosphere. The findings of this study are expected to serve as a valuable reference for teachers in selecting appropriate learning strategies that suit the characteristics of elementary school students, particularly in promoting communicative and collaborative English learning.

2. METHOD

2.1 Type of Research

This study used a quasi-experimental method with a Nonequivalent Control Group Design (Rogers & Revesz, 2019). This design was chosen because the researcher could not fully randomize the subjects but could still compare an experimental class (using the discussion method) and a control class (using conventional methods).

2.2 Population and Sample

The population of this study consisted of all fifth-grade students of SDN 8 Payung, divided into two classes with a total of 53 students. The sampling technique used was total sampling, involving all students from both classes:

- Experimental class: 26 students
- Control class: 27 students

2.3 Research Variables

- Independent Variable (X): Implementation of the group discussion method in English learning.
- Dependent Variable (Y): Students' critical thinking skills, including:
 - Analysis of language problems
 - Identification of relevant information
 - Evaluation and synthesis of ideas
 - Formulation of logical conclusions

2.4 Research Instrumen

The instruments used in this study included:

- Critical thinking test: Problem-based English questions measuring analytical and reasoning skills.
- Observation sheets: To assess students' activeness and participation during discussions.
- Documentation: Students' work results and photos of learning activities.

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The instruments were validated by two English education experts and tested in another class to ensure reliability.

2.5 Research Procedure

The study was conducted in three stages:

1. **Preparation Stage:** Determining classes, preparing materials, creating and validating instruments.
2. **Implementation Stage:**
 - Administering a pretest to both classes.
 - Conducting four sessions of group discussion learning in the experimental class.
 - Teaching the control class with conventional methods.
 - Administering a posttest to both classes.
3. **Final Stage:** Conducting observations, collecting documentation, and analyzing the data.

2.6 Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using two approaches:

- **Quantitative:** Calculating the mean score, gain score, and performing t-tests to identify significant differences.
- **Qualitative:** Describing students' activeness and the quality of discussion outcomes.

3 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Result

3.1.1 Description of Research Results

This research was conducted in the fifth grade of SDN 8 Payung, consisting of two classes: the experimental and control classes, with a total of 53 students. The experimental class (26 students) was taught using the group discussion method in English learning, while the control class (27 students) continued using conventional methods such as lectures and simple Q&A. The study took place over four meetings. Before treatment, both classes took a pretest to measure their initial critical thinking skills in English learning. After implementing the discussion method, a posttest was administered to evaluate improvement.

In addition to the tests, classroom observations and analysis of discussion results were conducted to obtain qualitative data supporting the findings.t.

3.1.2 Pretest and Posttest Results

Table 1. Students' Critical Thinking Scores Before and After Treatment

No	Student	Pretest	Posttest	Gain
1	Student A	55	78	23
2	Student B	60	82	22
3	Student C	58	80	22
4	Student D	62	84	22
5	Student E	57	79	22
6	Student F	59	81	22
7	Student G	61	85	24

8	Student H	54	77	23
9	Student I	56	78	22
10	Student J	60	83	23
...

Description:

- Pretest: Students' critical thinking scores before the implementation of the group discussion method.
- Posttest: Scores after implementation.
- Gain: The difference between pretest and posttest scores.

3.1.3 *Quantitative Data Analysis*

Based on the data:

- Average pretest score: 58.3
- Average posttest score: 81.2
- Average gain: 22.9

The t-test (independent samples) result showed sig. = 0.000 < 0.05, indicating a significant difference between the experimental and control classes.

Thus, it can be concluded that the implementation of the group discussion method has a significant effect on improving students' critical thinking skills in English learning. The considerable increase in average scores indicates that the discussion method effectively encourages students to think analytically, construct logical arguments, and understand linguistic contexts more deeply.

3.1.4 *Observation of Student Activity*

Observations over four meetings focused on participation, the ability to express opinions, cooperation, and reflection.

The results showed that:

- Before the discussion method, 72% of students were passive, only listening to the teacher with little participation.
- After implementation, 85% of students actively participated in discussions, expressed ideas in English, and responded to peers' opinions.

Student activities showed improvement, especially in:

- Asking questions in English
- Explaining opinions and providing examples
- Summarizing discussion results

Teachers also noted increased confidence and willingness among students to use English actively.

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3.1.5 Analysis of Discussion Quality

Analysis of students' discussion results revealed that:

- 18 of 20 students could summarize discussions logically using grammatically correct English.
- 16 students were able to connect discussion topics to daily life experiences.
- 15 students provided alternative solutions or viewpoints on problems discussed in texts or dialogues.

Teacher observations indicated that students began developing ideas independently and collaborating effectively in groups. The quality of arguments and linguistic accuracy improved compared to before the discussion method was implemented.

3.2 Discussion

The results show that the group discussion method effectively improves students' critical thinking skills in English learning at the elementary level. This method allows students to express opinions, analyze language problems, and develop ideas collaboratively.

These findings align with Vygotsky & Cole (1978), social constructivist theory, which emphasizes the importance of social interaction in cognitive and language development. In English learning, group discussions help students construct meaning through idea exchange and negotiation.

This study also supports the findings of Sukriyah & Agustina (2019), who stated that the discussion method enhances participation and learning outcomes because students are actively involved in constructing knowledge. Through discussion, students learn to evaluate arguments, draw logical conclusions, and use English in real-life contexts.

Therefore, the implementation of group discussions not only improves test scores but also develops students' communication, critical thinking, and social collaboration skills—key competencies in 21st-century education.

4 CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussion above, it can be concluded that:

1. The group discussion method significantly affects the improvement of students' critical thinking skills in English learning at SDN 8 Payung. The average score increased from 58.3 (pretest) to 81.2 (posttest), with an average gain of 22.9.
2. The implementation of this method increased student participation, with 85% of students showing high involvement in discussions, such as expressing opinions, asking questions, and responding actively.
3. The quality of discussion outcomes improved as students demonstrated the ability to connect English learning materials with real-life situations and construct logical solutions and conclusions using correct language.

Thus, the group discussion method can serve as an effective alternative teaching strategy to enhance students' critical thinking, communication, and collaboration skills in English learning at the elementary school level.

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