The Effect of Community Dialogue in Building Critical Thinking Skills in Essay Writing

Yulitriana[a], Natalina Asi[b], Richard Ferry Nugraha[c], Akhmad Fauzan[d,*]

[a] yulitriana@edu.upr.ac.id, English Language Education Department, Universitas Palangka Raya, Indonesia
[b] natalina@edu.upr.ac.id, English Language Education Department, Universitas Palangka Raya, Indonesia
[c] richard.ferry@fkip.upr.ac.id, English Language Education Department, Universitas Palangka Raya, Indonesia
[d] a_fauzan@edu.upr.ac.id, English Language Education Department, Universitas Palangka Raya, Indonesia
[*] Corresponding author, a_fauzan@edu.upr.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effect of community dialogue in building students' critical thinking skills in essay writing and their perceptions after learning through community dialogue. The experiment with pre-test and post-test design was employed, and 42 students participated. Two YouTube videos were used to provoke students' critical thinking and the students acted as presenters and reviewers in the community dialogue activity. When the intervention completed, the students had to develop a five-paragraph essay consisting of introduction, body, and conclusion. A non-parametric testing with Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test revealed that the statistical evidence comparing the students' essays in the pre-test and post-test shows a significant statistical difference (p=.001). A questionnaire was distributed to the students to get the data of their perceptions towards the implementation the community dialogue. The result of the questionnaire reveals that the majority of the students felt confident when they presented their outlines, though there is quite a high percentage of students who experienced anxiety at the same time. As for the reviewers, the students learned to think critically in order to find both the problems and the solutions in their peers' outlines and by doing so learned from their friends' work and revised theirs as necessary. Finally, the students concluded that the community dialogue was helpful in a writing class.

Keywords: critical thinking, essay writing, community dialogue

Introduction

Critical thinking is crucial due to its contribution towards concrete solutions to real life problems. Through critical thinking, students practice digesting information and using it appropriately for the benefits of solving life issues. In fact, critical thinking is rooted in students' engagement with problems (Dewey, 2001). Therefore, in order to promote critical thinking, teachers ought to begin every class with something that is a problem or a cause of wonder (Meyers, 1986).

Some literature has proved that writing can promote thinking. Good writing assignments raise a high level of critical thinking, help students engage deeply and effectively with course questions, and teach disciplinary ways of seeing, knowing and doing (Bean & Melzer, 2021). Therefore, writing is a process of doing critical thinking and a product that communicates the result of critical thinking (Bean & Melzer, 2021). However, for both teachers and students of an academic writing class, to experience writing as a process as well as a product of critical thinking is not that simple. Teachers should be able to create writing assignments and activities that require students to be able to think logically and critically regarding the important issues around them and the difficult part is awakening students to the existence of problems all around them (Bean & Melzer, 2021). In addition, teachers will encounter more challenges in helping students to view the problems as opportunities to improve life instead of as catastrophes that should be avoided. It is emphasized by (Bain, 2004) who states that highly effective teachers confront students with intriguing, beautiful, or important problems, authentic tasks that will challenge them to grapple with ideas, rethink their assumptions, and examine their mental models of reality.

Research has reported that feedback has positive impacts to encourage students' critical thinking (Ahmed, 2018; Damanik, 2022; Elboshi, 2021; Kuyyogsuy, 2019; Woodhouse & Wood, 2022). Similarly, other studies revealed that group work led to the highest scores in all proficiency levels and improved critical thinking regarding analyzing, evaluating and creating information (Moonma & Kaweera, 2021) and comparing with small group discussion, learning within a community of practice will be more effective (Sim, 2021) since the fundamental significance of community is producing knowledge as learners learn from each other to transfer what they know (Vygostsky, 1979).

In the current research, a community dialogue was applied through which students were encouraged to engage in the practice of criticality (Burbules & Berk, 1999). The community dialogue is in the form of conference peer feedback through which students of an academic writing class have discussion in big groups (13 to 15 students in each group) and give feedback to their peers' essay outlines. Concerning the previous research (Moonma & Kaweera, 2021), the big group is chosen rather than the small one as more experiences and contributions can be given and shared where there are larger numbers of students participating in the group. Besides, another study examines how a learning situation within an academic writing community can provide opportunities for authentic engagement in practice to develop critical thinking (Sim, 2021). Therefore, this current research would like to investigate the effect of community dialogue in building critical thinking skills in essay writing as well as to discover their perceptions towards the implementation of community dialogue in a writing classroom.

Research Questions

The questions of this research are formulated as follows:

1. Is there any effect of community dialogue in building students' critical thinking skills in essay writing?

2. What do students perceive on the implementation of community dialogue in building students' critical thinking skills in essay writing?

Literature Review

Critical Thinking and Essay Writing

Critical thinking is one of the global skills that today's learners inevitably have to learn in order to completely take part in 21st century life. It is defined as the capability to examine information carefully from different perspectives and develop the skills to overcome the problems (ELT Expert Panel, 2021). Consequently, through critical thinking, students are trained not only to simply receive information, but also to determine whether it develops problem-solving skills to form a balanced judgment. Furthermore, critical thinking is defined as skills to use words, to understand a context, feelings, and emotions and to build broad-mindedness that will lead to creativity and understanding (Cohen, 2015). Therefore, critical thinking does not merely develop certain skills in learners, but it also results in the capability to use those skills creatively and thoughtfully in order to deal with the problems they encounter.

Dewey (1909) stated that critical thinking is active, resilient, and thorough judgements of a belief or knowledge which is based on reasons and at the same time realizing the consequences of that belief or knowledge. Therefore, it is built through a process in which the learners should be willing to be active, persistent, and determined for the purpose of solving the problems. Their considerations towards solving the problems should be based on discerning minds and supported by sufficient reasons. Moreover, critical thinking is rooted in students' engagement with problems (Dewey, 2001) and critical thinkers are actively engaged with life (Brookfield, 1987). To conclude, in order to build critical thinking, problems should be comprehended as positive and motivating; thus, as students learn to engage with their problems, they also promote their critical thinking.

Norris and Ennis (1989) explain that critical thinking is reasonable, reflective thinking which is centered on determining one's belief and action. This emphasizes that critical thinking is reasonable and reflective thinking. Another definition mentions that critical thinking is skilled and active interpretation and evaluation of observations and communications, information and argumentation (Fisher & Scriven, 1997). Based on the two definitions, it shows that critical thinking may contribute to academic writing activities because students should state their ideas, opinions, or beliefs and they have to support them with sufficient facts and similar kinds of information. Two previous studies also proved that writing, especially argumentative (Sharadgah et al., 2019) and reflective writing (Ramlal & Augustin, 2020), can encourage thinking. Furthermore, critical thinking may increase students' success levels and affect their attitudes towards language courses positively (Epçaçan, 2019). Through writing, students are practicing being critical in order to get ideas to write and develop their ideas. The more argumentative and reflective their writing products are, the higher they will show the critical thinking level.

Experiencing writing as a process and a product of critical thinking, on the other hand, offers challenges. First, it does not naturally happen in academic writing classes. In other words, teaching students to write does not automatically develop their critical thinking skills; therefore, it is necessary to teach critical thinking in direct and systematic teaching (Karanja, 2021). Moreover, Condon and Kelly-Riley (2004) revealed that teaching critical thinking to students is highly complicated due to different social backgrounds and disciplines and they must develop assessment tools and processes that are capable of evaluating those outcomes. However, a study on students' critical writing skill level by Bitir and Duran (2021) shows that the students' scores on critical writing skills were generally at a low level and student achievements differed significantly according to socioeconomic level (in favor of high socioeconomic level) and gender (in favor of female students).

Some studies have been conducted to investigate academic writing and critical thinking skills. A case study was conducted on the use of online resources to develop critical thinking skills in regard to the construction of effective academic writing (Zhang, 2018). The result shows that through online resources, students gained knowledge on how online linguistic resources could be utilized for text analysis, evaluation, and regulation. There are also studies on certain strategies

used to develop critical thinking and writing skills, such as a targeted workshop (Ahmed, 2018) and peer feedback (Damanik, 2022; Elboshi, 2021; Kuyyogsuy, 2019; Woodhouse & Wood, 2022). These studies prove that feedback has positive impacts to encourage students' critical thinking. Through the workshop, students have explicit teaching and training on how to apply critical thinking skills. Similarly, by learning to give constructive feedback to their peers' work, learners have to read their peer's work critically, a practice of critical thinking. Other research is on the impact of WebQuest-based classroom on EFL learners' critical thinking and academic writing skills (Ebadi & Rahimi, 2018); writing-to-learn activities to improve critical thinking in social studies (Kayaalp et al., 2020), the effect of the International Critical Thinking Reading and Writing Test (ICTRWT), designed by Paul and Elder to a tertiary English as a Foreign Language (EFL) argumentative writing course (Lu & Xie, 2019), and the Effect of the 6+1 Trait Writing Model on ESP University Students Critical Thinking and Writing Achievement (Qoura & Zahran, 2018). All those strategies proved beneficial to develop critical thinking and to improve writing skills.

Community Dialogue

This current research focuses on the effect of community dialogue in building critical thinking skills in essay writing. Community is defined as a group of various kinds of people who share some common interests and serve various backgrounds and experiences (Barbaro, 2006) and dialogue refers to a community conversation or discussion to solve the problems within the community. In other words, community dialogue is a conversation or discussion of a group of people with similar interests in which they share their voices, talents, knowledge and experiences into the community. It is expected that through the community dialogue, the members can receive intelligible feedback to solve the problems within their work and improve their work quality at the same time.

The community dialogue in this research is in the form of conference peer feedback to help students focus on content and organization (A. Meyers, 2014); therefore, students' essay outlines were chosen for the concise and straight to the point representations of general overviews of students' essays which enabled their peers to directly encounter the main points and give feedback as needed. One article reported that the conference group feedback provides the possibility of noticing errors and the development of strategies (Zaccaron & Xhafaj, 2020). In addition, in spite of the restlessness students might experience through peer's correction during the community dialogue, it might benefit the students in becoming more attentive writers in future (Zaccaron & Xhafaj, 2020). During the community dialogue, students are required not only to be actively involved in discussions, but they also take part in argumentation, a metacognitive process that encompasses both critical thinking skills and dispositions (Dwyer et al., 2017). This strategy could be challenging in teacher-centered classrooms as teachers are culturally defined as the knowledge transmitters and students as passive learners (Tan, 2017) and this strategy moves learning from identifying and applying convention to the discovery of distinct ways of thinking and other possibilities of creating meaning (Lillis & Scott, 2007). Other challenges might possibly be encountered such as not all interactions between learners are collaborative (Storch, 2002; Zaccaron & Xhafaj, 2020) and not all feedback given by a peer is valid (Hu & Lam, 2009).

Methods

Procedures

The method used in this research was pre-experimental with pre-test and post-test design. The pre-test was conducted one week before the intervention began; while the post-test was done one week after the intervention was completed. The intervention was conducted in the form of writing activities comprising watching two YouTube videos, discussing the content of the videos, brainstorming, outlining, presenting & reviewing.

Table 1

Meetings in Intervention

Meeting	Stage	
1	a.	Watching YouTube videos
	b.	Discussing the content of the videos
	c.	Brainstorming
	d.	Outlining
2, 3, 4	a.	Presenting & reviewing
	b.	Giving feedbacks to their peers

In the first meeting of the intervention, the students were instructed to watch two YouTube videos entitled *A Guerilla Gardener in South Central LA | Ron Finley* (TED, 2013) and *Carolyn Steel: How Food Shapes Our Cities* (TED, 2009). The two videos were chosen because they contain the problems related to food and environment that the students can relate to their surroundings. The students were also given a statement from each video for them to get hold of the main idea. The statements are 'Food is the problem and food is the solution' (TED, 2013) and 'We are what we eat …We can use food as a really powerful tool to shape the world' (TED, 2009). After watching the two videos, the students discussed in small groups what they understood about the videos and the two statements. Afterwards they presented their understanding of the videos and the two statements.

In the third stage of the intervention in the first meeting, the students had to brainstorm by listing words and phrases they found from the two videos. Then the teacher wrote them on the whiteboard and the result was as follows:

Figure 1

List of Words & Phrases - Result of Brainstorming Activity

The fourth stage of the intervention was an outlining activity. The students were instructed to make an outline and they had to work individually. The outline comprised a thesis statement and three topic sentences of body paragraphs that they had to build into an essay later on.

In the second, third, and fourth meetings, the students had the community dialogue. The 42 students were divided into 3 groups consisting of 13, 14, and 15 students. When the students gathered in their groups, each student presented his/her outline and continued with a Question & Answer session in which the presenter and reviewers had discussion about the presentation – to clarify, to challenge, and to defend views. At the end of each discussion, reviewers wrote their feedback on Google Forms which sum up their responses towards each presenter; therefore, the students as presenters received both oral and written feedback from students as reviewers. For

each group, all the students had to listen to and give reviews for 12 to 14 presenters which means that all the members had the opportunity to learn from their peers (presenters) and engage with their problems. Subsequently, they also practiced giving valuable inputs for their peers' essay outlines, both in spoken and written forms.

Table 2

Questions on Google Form – Written Feedback for Presenters

Reviewer's Name:

1. The thesis statement is …
    o Arguable (you can agree or disagree with)
    o Not arguable (just about fact)

2. The scope is …
    o Too narrow
    o Too broad
    o Suitable

3. Do the topic sentences support the thesis statement?
    o Yes
    o No

4. Does the essay have unity? (Discussing one main idea from beginning to end)
    o Yes
    o No

5. Do you understand everything the presenter explains? Please give your comment.

Participants

This current study was conducted at the English Education Study Program of one public university in Palangka Raya, Indonesia. It involved 42 students of the Intermediate English Writing Class as the sample. When this research was conducted, the students had covered some materials related to basic structure of an essay, how to write a thesis statement, how to differentiate between facts and opinion, how to write introduction, body, and conclusion, as well as unity and coherence in essay writing.

They had passed the Basic English Writing class which focused on a paragraph writing course in the previous semester and the essay writing they had to deal with this semester certainly brought more complex demands of thinking and writing. In addition to that, the students often focus more on a good grade; thus, it is hard to develop a love of learning (Dahlgren et al., 2009). Also, they rely more on external instructions rather than exercising critical judgment acquired by an understanding of the underlying conventions and practice. They are unwilling to take risks and to enforce critical and creative thinking (Demirel, 2009).

The students were accustomed to small group discussions and having a community to share their academic thoughts was new for them. They had never been trained to do community dialogue before the data collection. Instead, small group discussions were used as both teachers and students were familiar with them. However, when it comes to complicated topics that require deeper discussions, more knowledge and experiences to be shared, small group discussions were considered not adequate to provide what the students need. As some studies (Sim, 2021; Zaccaron & Xhafaj, 2020) have suggested that a community dialogue can be used in writing classes, therefore this study conducted an experiment to find the effect of community dialogue to build critical thinking skills in essay writing. The community dialogue was an attempt to encourage the students to look beyond grades. It had a purpose of creating a safe place for them to interact meaningfully with others in their community to provide mutual support as each worked individually on their essay.

Instruments

There are two tests in the current research: the pre-test and post-test. The pre-test was conducted one week before the intervention began and the time allocation was 150 minutes. In the pre-test, each student should write an essay about food and environment. They were assigned to look at their own environment whether they could find any problems related to food and environment and their essays should reflect real life problems they encountered. The students should develop a five-paragraph essay consisting of an introduction, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion. The pre-test was intended to measure their skills in critical thinking as reflected in their essays before they had the intervention.

The next instrument was the post-test. It was conducted one week after the intervention was completed and the time allocation was 150 minutes. Each student also had to develop a five-paragraph essay consisting of an introduction, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion about food and environment. However, the teacher reminded the students not to repeat the ideas presented in the YouTube videos they watched in the first meeting; in other words, they should write their own original ideas. They used any ideas they found through the community dialogue activities. The post-test was intended to measure their skills in critical thinking as reflected in their essays after they had the intervention.

The current research also used a questionnaire to collect information or data related to students' perceptions towards the implementation of community dialogue in building critical thinking skills in essay writing. The questionnaire was adapted from Sim's (2021) article on enhancing critical thinking skills and dispositions through community dialogue in an academic writing program. The questionnaire has three dimensions namely students' role as presenters, as reviewers, and the discussion activity in the community dialogue. The questionnaire in the current research was developed in the form of Likert and open-ended questions. There were 23 statements for the Likert and there were four options in every statement (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, and Strongly Agree), due to the concern that certain respondents might use the middle category (neither agree nor disagree, not sure, or neutral) to avoid making a real choice (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010). In addition, there were 14 open-ended questions in the questionnaire which followed the Likert statement for the students to write down their reasons after they opted for the options Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, and Strongly Agree.

The questionnaire was distributed after the post-test was conducted. It was developed in Google Form and the link was given to the students through WhatsApp. The students filled it in by using their mobile phones or laptops.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data were collected from September to October 2022. In order to collect the data, the researcher underwent several stages. The first stage was conducting a pre-test before the intervention. The data were in the form of the result of students' writing test in the form of scores. One of the researchers acted as the scorer of students' essays for both pre-test and post-test. The scores were obtained by comparing the students' essays to Facione and Gittens' Rubric for Evaluating Written Argumentation (REWA) that includes basic elements of writing and critical thinking (Facione & Gittens, 2016).

Table 3

Rubric for Evaluating Written Argumentation (REWA)

Elements of Written Argumentations	Summary of Criterial Descriptions	Point
Purpose and focus	1) The nature and clarity of decisions the writer makes about focus, organization, and content in the writing	4 (Highly developed)
		3 (Developed)
		2 (Under-developed)
		1 (Substandard)
Depth of thought	2) The extent to which the author understands information and its implications beyond the immediate subject and context	4 (Highly developed)
		3 (Developed)
		2 (Under-developed)
		1 (Substandard)
Thesis	3) Availability and nature of assertions, and the extent to which they provide focus and direction to the essay	4 (Highly developed)
		3 (Developed)
		2 (Under-developed)
		1 (Substandard)
Reasoning	4) Quality of argument including evidence and development of ideas	4 (Highly developed)
		3 (Developed)
		2 (Under-developed)
		1 (Substandard)
	5) Quality and quantity of supporting evident and its relevance to the thesis	4 (Highly developed)
		3 (Developed)
		2 (Under-developed)
		1 (Substandard)
	6) The extent to which assumptions are recognized and made explicit	4 (Highly developed)
		3 (Developed)
		2 (Under-developed)
		1 (Substandard)
	7) The extent to which inferences and interpretations are analyzed and presented accurately	4 (Highly developed)
		3 (Developed)
		2 (Under-developed)
		1 (Substandard)
Organization	8) The sequencing of ideas within and across paragraphs, and the degree to which this facilitates coherence and readers' comprehension of ideas in the text	4 (Highly developed)
		3 (Developed)
		2 (Under-developed)
		1 (Substandard)
Voice	9) The writer's control of language to reflect confident voice/personality	4 (Highly developed)
		3 (Developed)
		2 (Under-developed)
		1 (Substandard)
	10) The degree to which the writer shows awareness of an intended audience and engages with that audience	4 (Highly developed)
		3 (Developed)
		2 (Under-developed)
		1 (Substandard)
Grammar and Vocabulary	11) How correctly grammar and vocabulary are used to promote the readability of the written text	4 (Highly developed)
		3 (Developed)
		2 (Under-developed)
		1 (Substandard)
Mechanics and presentation	12) The use of punctuation, spelling and capitalization, format and style in the written response	4 (Highly developed)
		3 (Developed)
		2 (Under-developed)
		1 (Substandard)

There are eight elements of written argumentation in the scoring rubric (purpose and focus, depth of thought, thesis, reasoning, organization, voice, grammar and vocabulary, and

mechanics and presentation) and there are twelve criterial descriptions. Students' essays are assessed according to the twelve criterial descriptions. Each criterial description is scored by giving point 4 (Highly developed), point 3 (Developed), point 2 (Under-developed), or point 1 (Substandard).

The same steps were conducted to get the data for the post-test. The data from pre-test and post-test were then analyzed by using the IBM SPSS software. Firstly, it tested the fulfillment of statistical assumptions (normality test) and then compared the data of pre-test and post-test.

For the questionnaire, the data from Likert were analyzed by calculating the percentages to show the students' perceptions towards the implementation of community dialogue in building their critical thinking skills during essay writing. The data from the open-ended questions were analyzed based on the theme in the students' answers to support the data from Likert.

Results

The Results of Writing Tests

In this study, the normality test was conducted to fulfill the statistical assumption. There were two sets of data comprising pre-test (N=42, Mean=62.94) and post-test (N=42, Mean=69.49). The normality test was done, and the significance level or the p-value from Shapiro-Wilk was taken for consideration in this study due to the number of the data that are less than 50 (N=42). Table 4 shows the test of normality of the students' writing in the pre-test and post-test. Since the significance levels or the p-values for the two sets of data are .755 and .009 respectively, the pre-test is $p>.05$ and it means that the data are normally distributed, while the post-test is $p<.05$ and it means that the data are not normally distributed.

Table 4

Test of Normality

	Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Pretest	.982	42	.755
Posttest	.925	42	.009

Since the statistical assumption is not fulfilled, the nonparametric testing with Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test was performed to analyze the data sets further. The statistical evidence comparing pre-test and post-test results reveals a significant statistical difference in students' writing after the implementation of the intervention ($p=.001$). The students obtained better scores in the post-test compared to the pre-test. It means there is a significant effect of community dialogue in building students' critical thinking skills in essay writing.

Table 5

Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

	Posttest - Pretest
Z	-3.193
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.001

The Results of Questionnaire

The questionnaire results are grouped into three dimensions, namely students' attitude towards writing activities (as presenters), students' attitude towards writing activities (as reviewers),

and students' attitude towards writing activities (group discussion in the community dialogue). The first part of Table 6 shows students' attitude towards their role as presenters during the community dialogue. It includes the information related to their confidence as presenters, their preparation for the presentation, their view towards their outlines and the discussion held in a big group, and how they perceived the contribution of their peer's feedback towards the improvement of their essays. The result shows that the majority of the students felt confident when they presented their outlines, but still, there was quite a high percentage of students who experienced anxiety at the same time. Although most of them had already prepared their outlines well, still they realized that their essay outlines had shortcomings and showing the problems to their peers caused restlessness to some of the students. However, almost all of the students experienced comfort discussing in their big group; and accordingly, most of them agreed that their peers' feedback helped them to locate the problems in their outlines as well as to improve their outlines. As a result, they revised their outlines based on their peers' feedback.

Table 6

Students' Perceptions Towards Community Dialogue

Dimensions	Statements	SA	A	D	SD
As Presenter	1. You felt confident when you presented your essay outline.	4.8%	52.4%	40.4%	2.4%
	2. You had a well-prepared essay outline.	12.0%	69.0%	19.0%	0%
	3. You realized that your essay outline had a lot of weaknesses.	38.0%	50.0%	12.0%	0%
	4. You felt comfortable discussing in a big group.	40.5%	54.8%	4.8%	0%
	5. Your peers' questions or feedback helped you to find problems in your outline.	45.2%	52.4%	2.4%	0%
	6. The discussion helped you to find the solutions to your problems.	57.1%	42.9%	0%	0%
	7. You revised your essay based on the feedback from your friends.	28.6%	71.4%	0%	0%
As Reviewer	1. You found that your friends experienced similar problems.	19.0%	76.2%	4.8%	0%
	2. Listening to presentations trained you to think critically.	31.0%	69.0%	0%	0%
	3. You found the problems in the outlines presented by your friends.	16.7%	71.4%	11.9%	0%
	4. You learned to solve the problems in your friends' outlines.	28.6%	66.7%	4.8%	0%
	5. You learned from the strengths of your friends' outlines.	35.7%	64.3%	0%	0%
	6. You learned from the weaknesses of your friends' outlines.	19.0%	81.0%	0%	0%
Discussion	1. Through the discussion, you learned how to make a more arguable thesis statement.	28.6%	71.4%	0%	0%
	2. Through the discussion, you learned how to make topic sentences based on the thesis statement.	16.7%	81.0%	2.4 %	0%
	3. Through the discussion, you gave a lot of feedbacks to your friends' outlines.	9.5%	66.7%	23.8%	0%

Dimensions	Statements	SA	A	D	SD
	4. After learning the weaknesses of your friends' outlines, you also criticized your outline.	33.3%	66.7%	0%	0%
	5. Through the discussion, you had the chance to compare the quality of opinions/arguments from your friends in the group.	14.3%	83.3%	2.4%	0%
	6. You had the chance to observe how your friends got ideas to write, and you could apply them to your outline.	26.2%	73.8%	0%	0%
	7. A big group discussion was more effective compared to a small group discussion.	19.0%	78.6%	2.4%	0%
	8. You received more feedback from a big group discussion than from a small group discussion.	33.3%	61.9%	4.8%	0%
	9. The discussions trained you to be more critical towards your own outline.	26.2%	73.8%	0%	0%
	10. Discussions in a big group are helpful in a writing class.	33.3%	66.7%	0%	0%

SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree

Concerning their role as the reviewers, the students discovered that the class basically shared similar problems; thus, it was reasonable when they said that by listening to their peers' presentations and discussing their problems provided valuable input to the students' reviewers since they could learn from their peers' strengths and weaknesses and revise their own if they faced the same problems. Moreover, they learned to think critically in order to find both the problems and the solutions in their peers' outlines.

The last part of Table 6 discusses the students' perception towards the role of the discussion itself as the strategy used in this research in building the students' critical thinking skills in essay writing. The questions provided were directed to show whether the discussion was effective in addressing students' needs in problems they encountered in essay writing; whether the discussion helped them to develop knowledge and experience regarding the topic assigned; and also, whether the big group discussion offers more benefits compared to the small group discussion.

According to the students' responses, the discussion provided them with the support for the problematic areas in their essay writing in terms of enabling them to write more arguable thesis statements, and then developing topic sentences which had unity with the thesis statement. Furthermore, through the discussion, most of the students gave feedback to their peers' work and the discussion also shows the essential role of community dialogue to give learners the chance to observe other learners in order to improve the various levels of quality within their work. They concluded that a big group discussion was more effective than a small group discussion since they received more feedback and it trained them to be more critical towards their own work. Finally, the students concluded that the community dialogue was helpful in essay writing class.

Discussion

The Effect of Community Dialogue in Building Critical Thinking Skills in Essay Writing

The result of statistical calculation towards the data of pre-test and post-test scores shows that there was a significant statistical difference in students' writing after the implementation of the intervention (p=.001). It means that community dialogue affects significantly the building of

students' critical thinking in essay writing. Concerning the pre-test and post-test scores, 59.52 % of the students made improvement in their post-test scores.

The activities in community dialogue include watching videos, discussing the content of the videos, brainstorming, outlining, presenting and reviewing as well as giving feedback to other students. These activities are regarded as effective to build students critical thinking because they have to show their capability to examine information carefully from different perspectives and overcome problems while using words, understanding a context, and building broad-mindedness (Cohen, 2015; ELT Expert Panel, 2021). As a result, when they write their essays, they have sufficient support to develop the ideas in written forms.

According to the REWA scoring rubric, there are twelve criterial descriptions to be assessed. The result of scoring the post-test using REWA scoring rubric, the students improved their essays points regarding thesis statements (criterial description 3), reasoning in terms of quality of argument including evidence and development of ideas (criterial description 4), reasoning in terms of quality and quantity of supporting evidence and its relevance to the thesis (criterial description 5), organization (criterial description 8), and voice in terms of the writer's control of language to reflect confident voice or personality (criterial description 9).

The following are examples of some thesis statements from the students' essays. Some thesis statements in the pre-test are underdeveloped as they fail to give a clear and well-defined focus towards the essay.

> Student A5:
> *Thesis statement (pre-test)*: They who serving the grill food make the air pollution and that can be one of reason the grill food is unhealthy.
> *Thesis statement (post-test)*: We can't eat grill food every day because it's unhealthy.

The Student A5's thesis statement in the pre-test is too specific and the focus is unclear. It was too specific as it refers to one reason the grill food is unhealthy (causing air pollution). In addition, it is not clear in the sentence whether the air pollution comes from the grilled food or people who serve the food. On the other hand, the thesis statement in the post-test is not too specific (We can't eat grill food every day because it's unhealthy) since the controlling idea can be developed into body paragraphs that explains why eating grilled food every day is unhealthy. There are some grammar errors found in the thesis statement in the post-test, but concerning the focus and meaning, it is already more developed.

> Student A19:
> *Thesis statement (pre-test)*: But right now, a lot of people consume unhealthy food because they did not have garden to planting them food and they had a difficult access to have healthy food from village to city.
> *Thesis statement (post-test)*: The food processing in the past was much better for the food produced and the environment.

The Student A19's thesis statement in the pre-test shows more about fact rather than opinion. It is a fact that people cannot consume healthy foods if the foods are not available around them. On the contrary, the thesis statement in the post-test provides a more arguable point regarding the food processing in the past which offers more benefits towards the food itself and environment. People can agree or disagree with this statement. The focus in the post-test seems to be different from the focus in the pre-test, but the thesis statement in the post-test was used as an opening sentence for the introductory paragraph and written in a question (Did you know why lifestyle of food like old era is better than now?). Through the process of negotiating meaning among students in the community dialogue, the writer discovered that the main idea of the essay ought to be put in the thesis statement at the end of the introductory paragraph.

Student A20:
Thesis statement (pre-test): Factory food also last longer than usual natural food and easily mass produced and very cheap to cover our needs.
Thesis statement (post-test): Now, we can't ignore both positive and negative impact of factory food, but we believe that the negative impact of factory food outweighs its positive impact.

The Student A20's thesis statement in the post-test is more arguable and it shows deeper thought as it can see beyond merely the advantages or disadvantages of factory food. The thesis statement of the post-test requires more critical thinking as it can present two things from different perspectives and still states clearly which side the writer is for. Compared to the thesis statement in the pre-test, it is more argumentative and it supports the previous research that more critical thinking is reflected in argumentative essay writing (Sharadgah et al., 2019).

Student A41:
Thesis statement (pre-test): What something that we eat refer to how we care for the environment and also for our self.
Thesis statement (post-test): Food affects the quality of life and environment.

A good thesis statement can also present the voice or personality of the writers. In Student A41's thesis statement of the post-test, the student is able to give more focus and voice to his essay. The better diction used gives the readers better understanding towards the thesis statement. Instead of saying "something that we eat," the writer directly writes "food." Furthermore, by saying "the quality of life and environment," it reflects confident voice and personality and it contributes to the deeper meaning of the information the essay discusses and its implication.

After the community dialogue, some of the students' scores in the post-test improved in reasoning and organization. In the pre-test, most of the essays were underdeveloped in terms of evidence and development of ideas and how they make their assumptions recognized and explicit. The essays could not provide an adequate amount of qualified supporting evidence relevant to the thesis. However, after the intervention, the students made progress in generating more developed ideas with sufficient support. As they can produce better purpose and focus for their essay and some with deeper thoughts, the students can make their assumptions more explicit and at the same time reflect a more confident voice or personality through their essays.

The following are samples of some essay outlines of students' essays in pretest and posttest.

Student A19:
Essay outline (pre-test)
Thesis statement: But right now, a lot of people consume unhealthy food because they did not have garden to planting them food and they had a difficult access to have healthy food from village to city.
Topic sentence 1: Healthy food can make a high quality person.
Topic sentence 2: The person who consumed unhealthy food will be easier to destroyed by disease.

Essay outline (post-test)
Thesis statement: The food processing in the past was much better for the food produced and the environment.
Topic sentence 1: The food processing was simpler than now.
Topic sentence 2: Now the processing food uses artificial ingredients, while in the past used natural ingredients.
Topic sentence 3: Food processing process in the past more environmentally friendly than now.

The Students A19's outline above shows how the essay improves significantly in the post-test. In the pre-test, the ideas were neither well-connected nor well-organized. It seems that the student had random ideas in her mind; therefore, she just wrote down things and eventually she

could only have three paragraphs in the pre-test. On the contrary, she could generate more ideas in a more organized way in the post-test as she could write five paragraphs for the essay (the last paragraph is a conclusion) and they all support the thesis statement adequately. Moreover, the essay improves a lot in reasoning since the quality of argument is served through the evidence and development of ideas. Similarly, as the organization is more advanced, it also exhibits the writer's confident personality and her awareness of the intended audience and how she engages with that audience (Facione & Gittens, 2016).

Student A20:
Essay outline (pre-test)
Thesis statement: Factory food also last longer than usual natural food and easily mass produced and very cheap to cover our needs.
Topic sentence 1: From explanation above we can see its negative impact.
Topic sentence 2: Factory food however still has its positive impact.
Topic sentence 3: The problem arise when we start depending on factory food so much that it replacing our natural food as we can see around us.

Essay outline (post-test)
Thesis statement: Now, we can't ignore both positive and negative impact of factory food, but we believe that the negative impact of factory food outweighs its positive impact.
Topic Sentence 1: First, let's start with the positive impact.
Topic sentence 2: Next is the bad impact of factory food.
Topic sentence 3: The reason why factory food negative impact outweighs its positive is because people often consumed it too much without balance from natural food.

The outline from student A20 above reveals how the essay is highly developed in the post-test. It states clear focus from thesis statement to topic sentences of body paragraphs. It also reflects depth of thought as the essay can display the extent to which the writer understands information and its implications beyond the immediate subject and context. Furthermore, the quality and quantity of supporting evidence progresses significantly since the writer's assumptions are made more explicit through the focus, organization, and content in the writing.

In spite of the progress made by the students, there are some (28.57 %) who have lower scores in post-test.

Student A16:
Thesis statement (pre-test): Good environment makes good quality of foods.
Thesis statement (post-test): Food produce depends on the environment because of it we must protect our environment through mutual assistance in cleansing near environment.

The Student A16's thesis statement of the pre-test has a better focus compared to the thesis statement of the post-test. In the thesis statement of the pre-test, the essay can be developed to explain why or how a good environment makes good quality food. On the contrary, the thesis statement of the post-test does not provide a clear focus and it is too long. In addition, it has opinions and facts in one sentence. If the post-test of the thesis statement is revised, it can be as follows.

Revised thesis statement: We must protect our environment since food production depends on it.

According to test results discussed above, community dialogue can provide valuable input for the students' essays; however, they should be able to digest the information suitable for their needs as not all feedback given by a peer is valid (Hu & Lam, 2009). It means that the more they need to practice critical thinking through such collaborative activities, the better their essays are. Through the community dialogue, some essays can be developed and have better focus and

sufficient evidence to support their thesis; on the other hand, other essays have the tendency to be regressive as the students fail to determine which information is appropriate for their essays. Instead of the barriers students might encounter in the community dialogue, it proves that it provides opportunities for authentic engagement in practice to develop critical thinking skills (Sim, 2021) and it might benefit the students in becoming more careful and mindful writers in future (Zaccaron & Xhafaj, 2020). This research also proves that by writing, students do not automatically develop their critical thinking skills (Karanja, 2021). They need such a community to get and to give feedback in order to improve and develop together.

All the complex processes to obtain this development as the result of the community dialogue is elaborated in more detail in the results of the questionnaire.

Students' Perceptions Towards the Implementation of Community Dialogue in Building Critical Thinking Skills in Essay Writing

Having a community dialogue as an activity in the writing class requires students to present their work to the group and it created restlessness in some students since they did not feel confident with their work. According to students' responses as presenters, in spite of all the preparation they had for their outlines, their outlines still had weaknesses such as having too general or too specific thesis statements, or the thesis statement was more about fact instead of opinion, or the essay was lacking unity since the thesis statements and topic sentences were not well-connected and organized. They might have realized it when they were presenting, but they did not know how to fix it. Some other students might know this from their friends' feedback after the presentation.

It was the first experience for the students to have a big group for presentation and discussion; however, almost all of them experienced comfort discussing in their big group; therefore, it became one of the basic foundations in helping them to get along well through the discussion. In the beginning, student presenters might be more concerned about the negative comments that might occur during the dialogue; in contrast, they admitted that they received more constructive comments during the discussion that equipped them to write better outlines for their essays. The feedback was mostly related to thesis statements such as "Don't write too general thesis statement," "The thesis statement should be more specific," "The thesis statement is not arguable," or "Pay attention to the difference between fact and opinion." Moreover, some feedback refers to the essay unity, for instance, "Your topic sentences are not connected to thesis," or "You need to focus on one topic only." One student also wrote, "Essay that I made was too similar to the examples given in the class, so my friends recommended me to change the whole essay." Through the dialogic and collaborative activity, student presenters received the input they needed, so they did not only encounter the problems within their outlines, but also the solutions on how to write better essays.

Likewise, listening to peers' presentations and discussing their problems provided valuable inputs to the students' reviewers since they could learn from their peers' strengths and weaknesses and revise their own when they faced the same problems. It supports the previous research that suggests the crucial importance of community is generating knowledge among learners (Vygostsky, 1979) since the conference peer feedback gives the opportunity to observe errors and development of strategy (Zaccaron & Xhafaj, 2020). Being a reviewer, the students learned to digest information and helped their peers to locate the problems in their outlines. As a result, they sharpened their thinking skills as they learned to look in detail and give constructive feedback towards their peers' work. This process trains them to be more careful writers in the future (Zaccaron & Xhafaj, 2020) through their experiences in witnessing their peers' strengths and weaknesses.

The problems in essay writing were obvious and having peers to share and to learn and work with to fix the problems made the students view the community dialogue in a positive way as small group discussion offers limited experiences compared to a big group discussion. Nevertheless, the responses also report that there was a percentage of students who did not actively

respond to their peers' work. It proves the previous research that stated some students tend to be passive learners (Tan, 2017) and not all interaction in the discussion was collaborative (Storch, 2002). It seems that the passive learners positioned their peers as the knowledge transmitters only without the intention of taking risks by asking questions and of giving opinions about their peers' work and in fact, it became the barrier that hindered the students from developing critical and creative thinking (Demirel, 2009). As a result, those students did not get a lot of benefits from the community dialogue as their essays were not more developed in the post-test.

Conclusion

Community dialogue in the form of conference peer feedback is an effective strategy in building students' critical thinking skills in essay writing since they can receive more feedback as valuable input to improve and develop their essays. Essay writing requires critical thinking because the students have to develop their essays by connecting their knowledge and experiences. The result of the current research has contributed to the practice of writing instruction in English classrooms. As the teacher implemented community dialogue, the students were actively involved in meaningful activities thus they gained benefits as they were trained to be critical from the first up to the last stage of community dialogue. In addition, having the role of reviewers in the discussion, students not only learn to contribute positively towards their peers' essay, but also get more insights for themselves as they learn from their peers' strengths and weaknesses. Through all the process of watching the videos, brainstorming, outlining, presenting, reviewing, and discussing, students are challenged to leave their comfort zones which is the barrier for progressing and advancing. As the process goes on, students' lack of confidence turns to love of learning since they experience the constructive contribution of collaborative engagement towards their knowledge and skills. Therefore, community dialogue can enrich students' experiences in writing classes in terms of building their critical thinking skills.

About the Authors

Yulitriana: A lecturer at the English Language Education Department of Universitas Palangka Raya. Her research interests include English Writing Skills, English Language Pedagogy, Flipped Learning, and Technology for Language Teaching and Learning.

Natalina Asi: A lecturer at the Graduate Program of English Language Education Department at Universitas Palangka Raya. Her research interests include Applied Linguistics, Sociolinguistics, English Speaking Skills, English Language Pedagogy.

Richard Ferry Nugraha: A lecturer at the English Language Education Department of Universitas Palangka Raya. His research interests include English Writing Skills, Translation, Computer-Assisted Language Learning, and English for Specific Purposes.

Akhmad Fauzan: A lecturer at the English Language Education Department of Universitas Palangka Raya. His research interests include Computer-Assisted Language Learning, Corpus-based Pedagogy, English Writing Skills, English Language Pedagogy.

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