

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### A. Background of Study

The 21st century's younger generation must possess greater skills and talents to stay up with the latest societal changes in order to compete in the era of the fourth industrial revolution, which is marked by remarkable advancements in internet technology. Schwab (2016) asserts that the modern era is a period of knowledge development where the boundaries between the digital, biological, and physical realms are distinct.<sup>1</sup>

Thinking is an active process rather than a passive one.<sup>2</sup> Critical thinking helps us make decisions, solve problems, and achieve our objectives. Critical thinking is recognized as an essential 21st-century skill, especially for students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). When students' critical thinking skills are engaged, they can achieve highly successful outcomes.

In education, critical thinking is nothing new. Critical thinking has been introduced in the 2013 Curriculum. The 2013 Curriculum, which places a strong emphasis on the development of student competences, has an impact on this critical thinking skill. Critical thinking abilities are linked in Curriculum 2013 to the development of students' character and the mastering of fundamental skills through a scientific method that involves observation, inquiry, experimentation, reasoning, and communication.

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<sup>1</sup> K Schwab, *The Fourth Industrial Revolution* (Penguin Books Limited, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Małgorzata Baran-Lucarz and Anna Klimas, "Developing 21st Century Skills in a Foreign Language Classroom: EFL Student Teachers' Beliefs and Self-Awareness," *Academic Journal of Modern Philology* 10 (2020): 23–38.

However, when policies shift in favor of the Merdeka Curriculum, students' freedom to choose learning in accordance with their needs and interests is increasingly combined with the development of critical thinking abilities. This curriculum has been modified to incorporate 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and components. One of the learning activities that helps students develop and strengthen their mindsets is critical thinking, according to changes made to the Minister of Education and Culture Regulation in 2018.<sup>3</sup> Teachers can apply critical thinking skills in learning activities since they received training and guidance during the prior Curriculum 2013 introduction, which has been very beneficial to them.

Critical thinking can be seen in two main ways: as a means to an end and as a process for making decisions.<sup>4</sup> Critical thinking can improve their ability to analyze language, make inferences, and engage more deeply with English texts, conversations, or tasks. The National Education Association (2012) identifies four 21<sup>st</sup> century life skills: communication, teamwork, creativity and innovation, and critical thinking and problem solving. Since learning activities begin with the thought process, critical thinking abilities form the basis for all other abilities. Critical thinking can also help one develop other talents like deeper analytical abilities and increased attention.

One approach that emphasizes critical thinking is problem-based learning. The Merdeka Curriculum gives teachers the freedom to create

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<sup>3</sup> Arina Zaida Ilma et al., "A Systematic Literature Review of STEM Education in Indonesia (2016-2021): Contribution to Improving Skills in 21st Century Learning," *Pegem Journal of Education and Instruction* 13, no. 2 (2023): 134–46.

<sup>4</sup> İrfan Tosuncuoglu, "Place of Critical Thinking in EFL," *International Journal of Higher Education* 7, no. 4 (July 16, 2018): 26, <https://doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v7n4p26>.

problem-based learning, which is more pertinent to motivating students to think critically in authentic settings. Additionally, the Merdeka Curriculum highlights the value of diversified instruction, which enables teachers to modify their teaching strategies and approaches in accordance with the unique requirements and characteristics of each student.

Problem-Based Learning (PBL) is an instructional approach where teachers present students with real-world problems as a framework for problem-solving. This method fosters critical thinking, enabling students to acquire knowledge and develop decision-making skills. In PBL, authentic problems serve as the foundation for the learning process, motivating students to collect information and data to address these challenges.<sup>5</sup>

Problem-based learning (PBL) has emerged as an effective teaching approach to developing critical thinking skills, as it involves students in solving real-world problems that require them to ask questions, conduct research, and apply their knowledge. However, EFL students often encounter obstacles in developing critical thinking skills, such as language limitations and traditional educational practices that emphasize language accuracy over analytical skills.

Additionally, advancements in technology and the presence of AI can make students reluctant to think critically, as these technologies offer faster and more efficient solutions. These challenges highlight the essential role of English teachers in adapting PBL to meet students' needs. Teachers who use strategies such as providing guidance in the problem-solving process, selecting interesting and relevant problems,

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<sup>5</sup> Tosuncuoglu.

and offering language support can have a significant impact on students' critical thinking abilities.

Although research shows that PBL is effective in improving critical thinking skills, more research focusing on the EFL context is needed to examine the specific strategies used by teachers and the challenges they face in implementing PBL. This study aims to explore those strategies and provide insight into best practices for improving critical thinking skills in EFL students.

Many people have researched Problem-based Learning and its relationship with Critical Thinking, one of them is an article by authors Saiful Amin, Sugeng Utaya, Syamsul Bachri, Sumarmi, and Singgih Susilo in 2022 with the research title "Effect of Problem-Based Learning on Critical Thinking Skills and Environmental Attitude" This study aims to address students' lack of environmental awareness and critical thinking skills in Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang's Social Science Education Program. The research employs a quasi-experimental design with a pretest-posttest control group format. A total of 50 students participated, divided into experimental and control groups of 25 each. Data on critical thinking skills were collected through standardized tests, while environmental attitudes were assessed using a questionnaire. According to the authors, PBL promotes involvement and active participation, which improves problem-solving skills and deepens comprehension of environmental challenges. They draw attention to the fact that conventional teaching approaches frequently fall short of equipping students with the critical thinking and environmental awareness they need. The paper offers insightful information about how well PBL works to improve students' environmental attitudes and critical

thinking abilities. It implies that in order to prepare students for issues they may face in the real world, educational processes ought to include more interactive and problem-solving techniques. Future studies could build on these results by investigating long-term effects and conducting comparable research in various educational contexts. All things considered, this study makes a substantial contribution to the field of education by supporting approaches that foster environmental stewardship and critical thinking.

This research is phenomenon that occurs in the classroom, especially the low participation of students in asking and answering questions from the teacher, as well as how they solve problems related to learning. In addition, the use of cell phones in the classroom is one of the factors that affect students' critical thinking skills. Many high school students tend to rely on technology, for example by directly utilizing AI to find answers without going through the process of reading, sorting, or understanding the content, but rather just copying and pasting it raw. Another factor that contributes to students' low critical thinking skills is the lack of motivation to learn. Some students feel reluctant to learn or see school as a formality to fulfill their obligations as children.

Critical thinking is needed to fulfill the needs of students. But in reality, many students still do not maximize this and there are many factors that cause students to be less able to maximize their critical thinking abilities to the fullest. This research focuses on how English teachers use Problem Based Learning and uses informal interviews conducted by researcher, namely unofficial interviews with respondents. Where the respondents in this study were 8<sup>th</sup> grade English teacher at SMPIT Widya Cendekia and 11th grade English teacher at SMK Negeri

8 Kota Serang. Therefore, the researcher felt interested in the problem itself.

Although the curriculum has changed and times have changed, efforts to help students improve their critical thinking abilities have continued, but with a more contextualized and flexible approach that is more in line with current demands. Additionally, the Merdeka Curriculum highlights the need of varied instruction in order to help students grow their critical thinking abilities through a more individualized and purposeful educational experience.

Students can feel more relaxed discussing, working together, and exchanging ideas in a welcoming and inclusive learning atmosphere. In addition to improving their critical thinking abilities, this also gets them ready to lead and solve problems effectively in the future. Therefore, this method not only satisfies students' academic requirements but also gives them the tools they need to handle the always changing global difficulties.

It is believed that this study would offer fresh perspectives on the original goal of the research, which was to help students develop their critical thinking abilities or give teachers useful answers to the challenge of teaching critical thinking.

## **B. Identification of Problem**

Critical thinking is an essential skill for students in the 21st century, as it enables them to analyze information, make informed decisions, and solve problems effectively. However, in practice, many students still struggle to develop this skill comprehensively. One likely reason is the digital age, which often leads students to rely on fast, instant information

sources that, while convenient, do not require deep engagement or critical analysis. This habit of consuming information quickly can limit their ability to engage in thoughtful evaluation and reasoning.

Additionally, many students miss valuable opportunities to ask questions and clarify understanding—whether due to shyness, fear of judgment, or viewing learning as a mere formality. Compounding this issue, teachers may not always actively encourage inquiry or open dialogue in the classroom, resulting in a learning environment that doesn't fully support the cultivation of critical thinking. As a result, students become less familiar with analytical and evaluative processes, both of which are crucial for building a solid foundation in critical thinking.

### **C. Limitation of Problem**

From the identification of the problems above, the researcher limited the problem as follow:

1. The researcher focus on how English teachers' strategy on using Problem-Based Learning Method in enhancing EFL students' critical thinking
2. The subject as the research are English teachers at the SMPIT Widya Cendekia and SMKN 8 Kota Serang
3. The research implemented a case study research.

### **D. Formulation of Problem**

Based on the identification of problem, the study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. How did English teachers apply the Problem-Based Learning Method in the classroom for enhancing students' critical thinking skills?
2. What obstacles faced by English teachers encounter when using PBL as a learning method to enhancing critical thinking in students?

### **E. Objective of Study**

Based on the formulation of the problem above, the objective of this study is as follows:

- 1) To Identify the strategies used by English teachers in implementing PBL for enhancing critical Thinking in EFL students
- 2) To explore the obstacles faced by English teachers in using PBL as a learning method for enhancing Critical Thinking of EFL Students.

### **F. Significances of Study**

There are two significant of this study can be viewed in to approaches:

1. It is crucial to research how English teachers use problem-based learning since it can aid EFL students in developing their critical thinking abilities. By analyzing the benefits and challenges of applying PBL, this study can provide valuable insights into effective teaching practices that promote deeper learning and engagement in language education. Ultimately, this approach not only prepares students for academic success but also equips them with the skills necessary to tackle difficult real-world issues.



2. Practically this study offers some benefits for teachers, students, and researcher:

- a) For the Researcher

The researcher are from the education department and will eventually become teachers, this is highly helpful to them. Thus, the researcher will be able to determine how the teacher's use of the PBL learning technique enhances the critical thinking skills of EFL students.

- b) For the Teachers

This is very beneficial for teachers because with the help of this research, the teacher will become more knowledgeable in handling situations or problems that are pertinent and capable of inspiring students and encouraging their active participation. Additionally, the teachers can develop and implement an effective problem-based learning strategy, which will help them be more enthusiastic and engaged in their lessons.

- c) For Students

The ability to think critically, recognize and resolve issues, and base judgments on analysis are all taught to students. Both learning English and living a normal life require these abilities. Because they believe they are actively participating in their own education, students who solve problems often feel more challenged and inspired.

## **G. Organization of Discussion**

There are five distinct chapters in the paper. A brief overview of each chapter is offered below.

Chapter I is an introduction. This chapter will consist of four sub-chapters; a) background study, b) identification of problem, c) formulation of problem, and d) objective study.

Chapter II is a literature review. This chapter will discuss the basic theory as a reference for this research. The basics of theory will be explained through several titles, including Problem Based Learning and Critical Thinking.

Chapter III is a methodology. This chapter will consist of several sub-chapters, such as research design, the setting of the research, subject of the research, research instruments, data collection techniques and data analysis procedures.

Chapter IV is finding and discussion. This chapter will consist of two sub-chapters; a) findings, and b) discussion.

Chapter V is closing. This chapter will consist of two sub-chapters; a) conclusion, and b) suggestion.