

## **THE USE OF SONGS TO ACTIVATE STUDENTS' CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS**

**Rachmawati Achadiyah<sup>1</sup>**

**Muhammad Ulul Azmi<sup>2</sup>**

University of Kyai Abdullah Faqih Gresik (UNKAFA) Gresik<sup>12</sup>

achadiyahzakariyah@gmail.com<sup>1</sup>

azmizam99@gmail.com<sup>2</sup>

### **Abstract**

Previous research has demonstrated the great success of the use of song in teaching listening skills integrated with critical thinking skills. Myriad research has examined the role and the benefits of songs in ELT with monotonous activities. Therefore the study is conducted to bring new insights into it. Five English teachers with more than seven years of teaching experience and have completed teaching critical thinking trainees were selected as the research participants. Since an observational fieldnote was used to obtain the data this study employed a case study as the design. This study discussed the teaching steps of teaching listening skills which used the song as the main material integrated with critical thinking. Several ways revealed by the teacher to activate students' critical thinking are providing critical questions related to the content of the song and stimulating students constantly to eager them to answer critically. Several strategies adopted by these teachers include: highlighting several words and asking about the meaning, connecting to students' real-world settings, assigning them to make a judgment, and examining the current situation and conditions, These five teachers applied a higher-order thinking style to their teaching and have effectively activated and guided students to think critically.

**Keywords:** *Critical Thinking, Critical Listening; High Order Thinking Skills, Songs*

### **Introduction**

Critical thinking is highly encouraged to be cultivated and implemented in today's life concerning the presentation of the National Education Association (NEA) (Jebbour, 2019) in Indonesia, critical thinking has been introduced and assigned to be integrated into teaching-learning as the realization of Merdeka Belajar curriculum. Cultivating, activating, and teaching critical thinking to Indonesian students are compulsory to be implemented in the teaching-learning process. Critical thinking is a thinking style that belongs to Higher-order Thinking Style (HOTS). It leads students to be critical thinkers which not only accept

information and knowledge without analyzing at a higher level. Taken as a whole, the integration of Critical thinking in the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum aims to develop passive thinking into critical thinking. Promoting students' critical thinking in teaching-learning assists them to live globally (Cottrell, 2017). Hence, the implementation of critical thinking into language teaching-learning should be performed to foster students to be critical thinkers.

Critical thinking has several sub-thinking skills which require students to think higher and more critically. Pithers & Soden (2000) proposed that critical thinking involves several abilities such as examining information received whether belongs to a problem, fact, or assumption, analyzing, evaluating, and drawing a conclusion, inductive and deductive logic, and checking the validity and reliability of information sources. Scriven and Richard cited by (Khairiyah, 2021) also argued that the other's argument about critical thinking is intellectual competence which has the self-controlled process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating information gathered from or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action. It is based on personal intellectual values that excel in subject matter divisions: clarity, accuracy, precision, consistency, relevance, sound evidence, good reasons, depth, immensity, and equity. Concerning the benefits of critical thinking, students must have critical thinking skills to give judgments appropriately and take action rationally to everyday problems.

The implementation of critical thinking is firmly suggested in language teaching. Suharno and Setyarini (2021) asserted that critical thinking must be cultivated for students even in their primary ages. A teacher needs to train critical thinking in their students in every aspect of teaching-learning, including language learning. students' ability in grasping knowledge, information, thoughts, and new ideas from a foreign language is bigger influenced by their ability to process these. (Suharno & Setyarini, 2021) Indeed, the fundamental of these is students' foreign language competence. This idea initiates why critical thinking also must be integrated into English language teaching.

Concerning the benefits of being critical thinkers for students, ELT teachers must be able to integrate, teach and activate students' critical thinking skills in the English classroom. ELT teachers' knowledge and creativity have an important role to implement this. As Wenjuan revealed that teachers must decide on students' activities that guide them to think critically. The activity must be designed with a higher thinking level; analyzing, evaluating, and creating. (Song, 2019) Other crucial aspects are the teaching methodology and teaching material. Critical thinking might not be successfully implemented if it implements with certain teaching methods such as Grammar translation method and audio-lingual method. Similarly with teaching methodology, teaching material performs decisively in integrating critical thinking in English class.

Equally important to the thinking level, teaching also must consider the materials. Materials in ELT are categorized into two; authentic and created materials. Authenticity comes from the real world. It is created to use for the specific purpose of native speakers. In line with this Goodwin et al., (2009) affirmed that authentic material is real-life material as materials that native speaker uses every day for social relationship purposes. (Goodwin et al., 2009) The characteristic of authentic materials can be in form of written or spoken language. Authentic materials depict the materials from the authenticity in time, people, and location. Febrina (2017) proposed some examples of authentic materials; magazines, maps, news, tv shows, songs, and posters. While non-authentic materials or created materials are teaching materials that are created and designed for certain purposes. These materials come from a plan, learners' need analysis including necessities, lacks, and wants. Additionally, created resources are made in accordance with each nation's curriculum and regulation; in this case, Indonesia these materials are usually in the form of textbooks. The using of materials are one of the key components to foster the effective teaching learning (Pardo et al., 2009).

The advantages of utilizing authentic resources for teaching English have been established by many researchers (Ahmed, 2017); (Pardo et al., 2009), (Hestiningtyas et al., 2021); (Oura, 2001) Their studies claimed that actual

resources enable students to interact with real-life and gain more exposure to the target language. Moreover, authentic materials help students to engage in the topic learning with ease. Utilizing authentic materials in English class can assist students to prepare themselves using English outside the classroom and use English as a medium to communicate effectively. Immense frequency in using authentic materials will familiarize students with the target language. Familiarity with target language sustains students to motivate students' willingness and interest (Guariento & Morley, 2001). After they have been accustomed to the language through practice in class it will be easier to use it in a real-life situation. Moreover, Gilmore cite in (Ahmed, 2017) has discovered that the use of authentic materials has a relation to students' communicative competence. His research involved 62 university students in Japan and assigned them to take several tests which is related to communicative competence; a listening comprehension test, a pronunciation test, a C-test, a grammar test, a vocabulary size and knowledge test, a discourse completion task, an oral interview, and a role-play. The finding indicates that students who work with authentic materials improve their communication skills more than those who do not. Another study was conducted by Purcell-Gates, Degener, Jacobson, and Soler (2002) who invited 159 adult learners to take part in their study. They revealed that authentic materials improve students' literacy development. They proved that learners are easy to write more complex after the teacher introduced them to authentic materials (Purcell-Gates et al., 2002). Concerning the plenty benefits of utilizing authentic materials in language learning, teaching critical thinking can admit authentic materials as the main resource.

As has been noted, authentic materials have two types; spoken language and written language. It signifies that spoken language uses as a medium to teach listening and written language uses as media to teach writing. Klickaya (2004) specified concrete examples of both spoken and written authentic materials, spoken authentic materials are in a form of songs, tv news, tv shows, movies, and radio shows. Further, the written form is in the form of a magazine, poster, map, and realia or real-world objects. (Kilickaya, 2004)the present study focused on

spoken authentic materials as listening materials are also major materials to integrate critical thinking in English learning.

Critical thinking skills have been broadly investigated by researchers related to reading and writing skills (Din, 2020); (Kohzadi et al., 2014); (Ginting & Muhammadiyah, 2021); (Patahuddin et al., 2021). They have conducted research in which critical thinking is a basic topic and correlated or sought the effectiveness with reading and writing. Nevertheless, only a few studies have shown and investigated critical thinking skills with speaking and listening skills. That phenomenon initiates the present study to explore how critical thinking is taught with listening and speaking skills.

The overall purpose of this study is to illustrate how teaching critical thinking may be done through songs. The teaching stages can be adapted for other English teachers to be implemented when they use songs when teaching listening. These point out the advantages and practicability of the integration of songs and critical thinking becomes teaching listening more meaningful, and more active, and raising students' critical thinking skills.

## **Method**

A qualitative study was performed in this study since it responds to understanding how people deal in their real-world settings (Yin, 2018). Furthermore, a case study became the research design of this study. It underlies Yin that a case study research is examining social conditions. Further, he stated that case study research employs to answer the research problem of “why and how” the phenomena happened (Bowen, 2009). The research participant of this study are five English teachers with more than five years of teaching experience and have completed teaching critical thinking training. They were chosen to take part in this study. They teach in the same school which the school has applied the Cambridge curriculum and a National Curriculum. The school has implemented the 21<sup>st</sup> learning style in their teaching-learning for many years and has been claimed as a school pilot of Madrasah Tsanawiyah in Sidoarjo. The research presence in this study is as an observer. The researcher came and joined the

teaching-learning process. The procedure of handling the data followed Yin (2008) which was an observational fieldnote. The only instrument was used to explain and tell in detail how the song was used to activate students' critical thinking in English class. The observational fieldnote is a text or words recorded during an observation. The observational fieldnote can help the researcher to illustrate in detail the activities that happened during the teaching-learning process. The form of observational fieldnote is adapted from Creswell (2016) cited by Fakhomah and Utami (2019) which is adjusted by the researcher to suit the needs. The observational fieldnote consisted of three points; classroom setting, time length, and the description of teaching-learning. This data was obtained in October 2022. Five classes with five teachers were observed twice. Data reduction, data display, and conclusion were administered to analyze the data. Reducing data means enclosing, choosing the main data, and focusing on important data. It gave a clear illustration and made it easier for the researcher to display the data. Moreover, data display assisted the researcher to reveal the findings. The last step of analyzing the data was drawing a conclusion which was undertaken to state the objective learning

## **Findings And Discussions**

Before class, the teacher carefully selected a song. The song must have moral messages and be meaningful. This was done to ease the teacher when they connected the song's content to students' daily life phenomena. The teaching procedures can be demonstrated as follow:

### **First Teacher**

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1. The teacher provided the song "Not Alone" by Linkin Park which she considered as a meaningful song which has a humanity message.
  2. Teacher started to ask the opinions of some students about the song title. She asked students to predict the content of the song from the title.
  3. the teacher distributed song lyrics with some vocabularies-blanked.
  4. The teacher asked students to read first and highlighted the vocabulary that they never know. (This step is claimed as vocabulary acquisition)
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5. Students listened to the song and fill in the blank vocabulary.
  6. Teacher and students answered together the blank vocabulary and discussed it.
  7. Teacher asked students to summarize the content of the song and asked whether they have found similar phenomena in their life or had not.
  8. Teacher gave feedback to students.
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The thinking style which was used by these five teachers were analyzed by using Taxonomy blooms. Taxonomy blooms is a thinking hierarchy which was invented by Benjamin blooms. He categorized cognitive thinking level into six categorizations. They were remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and interpreting. Each category has several sub-thinking kinds.

The first teacher decided on the song that the students must listen to, which was about humanity. Before listening, the teacher stimulated students by exploring their opinion. The teacher also assigned students to complete vocabulary exercises which she admitted as vocabulary acquisition. Then, the teacher assigned students to summarize the content of the song and to make judgments of the song's content in their daily life. Stimulating students' opinion which aims at exploring their ideas and thoughts before listening and asking them to make judgements are belonging to evaluation thinking style. Evaluation is a part of critical thinking style. In the same vein, students were asked to summarize the content of song and analyze whether they found same phenomena or did not. This activity elicits students' critical thinking by developing their thoughts which stating the content of song and connecting it into their daily life. Developing some thoughts with other phenomena belongs to higher thinking abilities based on (Noorhapizah et al., 2020).

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### **Second Teacher**

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1. teacher chose "Heal the world" by Michael Jackson This song was being chosen because it has humanity messages.
  2. teacher told students that they are going to listen to a song.
  3. teacher has provided filling in the gap (Missing words) and students are asked to read briefly the song lyrics and ask whether they have already listened to the song or have not.
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4. Teacher plays the song twice and asks the students to listen to the song.
  5. the teacher first asked students about the song's content, and what approximately the song is about by reading the title.
  6. teacher constantly elicits students by questioning: the meaning of words. "What is the meaning of *Heal the World?* and the lyric pieces; what is the meaning and what does it mean to *Make it better place*. the teacher ask four questions to engage students' participation.
  7. the teacher plays music and together with the students listens to music, and answers together the missing words. this activity is done to acquire students' new vocabulary.
  8. teacher highlighted the new vocabulary and asks students to create a sentence using the word. After the missing words are completely answered, the teacher starts to ask critical questions:
  9. What does Michael Jackson want to tell to listeners?
  10. Can you specify the theme of this song?
  11. what does the word *No hurt and sorrow* mean? What is your opinion? Why did the composer of this song put these in the song lyric?
  12. based on your own opinion How is *a better place* look like?for what nationality the song is addressed? state your reason and evidence to support it!, in the "bliss" we can not *fee* what do the words mean?
  13. how is *dread* look like in this song? do you agree the phrase *dream we would convince* is the same as the *dream comes true*? if it is different, state your reason!
  14. shine in grace, what does it mean? can you explain briefly the meaning of this phrase *then why do we keep strangling life wound this earth, crucify it's soul*?
  15. By reading the whole lyric, what approximate message the composer and the singer would tell?
  16. Teacher gave feedback to students on the social function and generic structure of the song.
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The second teacher stimulated students to think critically by highlighting the words and phrases of the song. Students were stimulated continually. The highlighted words and phrases might create different meanings for each student. This stage belongs to the critical activity which leads students to interpret the meaning. They learn how to interpret song lyrics based on the whole content. Interpreting the song's content includes making judgments that were the domain of evaluating thinking. The evaluation was categorized as higher order thinking level or critical thinking level. (Hadi, 2019) confirmed the use of songs in teaching



listening to gain more students' enthusiasm especially when they were asked to make judgments of what the songs mean.

### **Third Teacher**

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1. Teacher provided some songs: Daddy Lesson by Beyonce, Who says by Selena Gomes, and The Scene, A million dreams by The Greatest showman cast.
  2. Students chose "Who says" By Selena Gomes and The Scene.
  3. Teacher showed the English lyric video.
  4. Students were listening three times. The first chance is to find words, phrases, and expressions that they do not know the meaning, the second chance to enjoy the music and third chance is to try taking the message from the song.
  5. Teacher pointed students randomly to three students to present their vocabularies and asked for others to find the meaning.
  6. Teacher typed in the slide the difficult vocabulary and their meanings to verify the answer whether they are correct or not.
  7. Teacher asked students randomly to explain what is the detailed meaning and life illustration related to the vocabulary:
    - Insecure
    - Diamond in the rough
    - I'm no beauty queen, I'm just beautiful as me
    - Who says you are not worth it?
    - The price of beauty
    - Keep without the truth
    - Gets to see the light
    - Keep you beneath the star
    - Won't let you touch the sky
    - Star potential
    - Pass the best
  8. Teacher asked social function and generic structure of the song to students and directly verified their answers.
  9. Teacher gave feedback to students.
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The third teacher set about her class similar to what the second teacher has done. She highlighted words and phrases that are uncommon and contain figurative language that students need to think about. She also required students to describe the illustration and the condition in student's daily life. Such as "Insecure" what are insecure means? Have you ever felt insecure? Why did you feel like that and how do you overcome that? This typical question explores students' thoughts and

opinions in illustrating how insecure feelings are. The teacher was trying to connect the meaning of insecurity to students' real-life experiences. It assists students to understand the words meaningfully. The activity belongs to connecting thinking style and interpreting which were the domain of analyzing and evaluating thinking style categorization. Elmosnino (2022) elucidated that critical listening can be achieved in listening activities when listening comprehension is critical. It is indicated by critical questions. (Elmosnino, 2022)

#### **Fourth Teacher**

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1. The teacher divided students into four groups. Every two groups listened to the same song. The first song was a million dreams by Hugh Jackman and Michelle Williams, and Daddy lesson by Beyonce
  2. Teacher provided song lyrics and asked students to read first.
  3. Teacher distributed the group worksheet consisting of several questions related to songs they are going to listen to and vocabulary matching task. In this stage, the teacher claimed that he provided listening comprehension. Most questions are indicated as critical questions whose thinking styles are: synthesizing, making judgments, giving opinion, and predicting.
    - Can you mention what effort means by this composer from this song? (analyzing)
    - There's a house we can build, what is the meaning of this phrase. Can you interpret it? (Evaluating/Making Judgment)
    - What is "vision" do you have any vision in your life? How do you achieve it? (Giving opinion, connecting to students' life)
    - How do you make meaning of the daddy lesson song?
  4. Teacher played each song twice and the students listened to the song.
  5. Teacher asked students to complete their worksheets after listening.
  6. Teacher asked students to present their work.
  7. Teacher asked each group to represent their members to sing the song.
  8. teacher gave feedback to students.
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#### **Fifth Teacher**

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1. Teacher pointed a student to be asked about his favorite singer and song. Teacher asked him to sing briefly. Teacher asked to the student why he liked his song and what was the message of the song.
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2. Teacher told students that they were going to learn about making judgments and connecting the message of the song to their daily life.
  3. Teacher stimulated students with the question of what is the social function of song, its generic structure, and its language feature. Teacher pointed three students to answer and directly verified them.
  4. Teacher provided some options of song and took voting to students of what music they were going to learn. The “Imagine” song by John Lenon was chosen.
  5. Teacher distributed a worksheet on listening comprehension of the song to students and asked students to complete it after they finish listening.
  6. Teacher played the music twice.
  7. Teacher pointed out three students to present their work (as mentioned in point 2).
  8. Teacher showed the video of the song and tell the content of the song in his version.
  9. Teacher asked the student to submit the worksheet
  10. Teacher asked three students to mention three points of what they learned about the song.
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The fourth and the fifth teacher have similar activities in teaching songs. The fourth teacher began the class by reading part of the song lyrics and distributing worksheets that consisted of several critical questions related to the song. The questions provided were typical questions that raised students’ critical thinking. Such as “Can you mention what effort means by this composer from this song?”, “There’s a house we can build, what is the meaning of this phrase? Can you interpret it?”, “What is “vision” do you have any vision in your life? How do you achieve it?”, “How do you make meaning of daddy lesson song?” the teacher utilized the segment of the song’s lyrics to be interpreted by students. The teacher also tried to associate the word “vision” with students’ real-life experiences. These activities are interpreting of song’s lyric meaning and associating the words in the song lyric with students’ real experiences. These two activities belong to evaluating and creating thinking styles. (Davoudi & Sadeghi, 2015) ascertained higher questions level that teachers used affected students’ responses. The quality of students’ answers has improved following the teachers’ questions.

Similar to the fourth teacher, the fifth teacher preferred to start teaching by asking students' favorite song and why they liked the song. This pre-activity assists the teacher to engage students in topic learning critically by exploring the reason why they liked the song and exploring the message that they got from their favorite song.

Advanced teaching steps have been accomplished by five English teachers in teaching listening skills by utilizing songs as the learning source. They also have integrated critical thinking skills into their teaching activities. Students have been led to think critically with various activities which also activate critical thinking skills. Analyzing the content of the song, making judgments of the content of the song, connecting the content of the song to their daily life, and highlighting words and phrases of songs become teaching activities. All activities that have been taught by these five English teachers belong to critical thinking skills. They are analyzing, synthesizing, evaluating, and creating.

It was previously reported by Eka and Lestari (2013) that songs can promote students' critical thinking skills by figuring out the implicit meaning of the songs. Students were challenged to catch the main message of the song through words and phrases that contain figurative language, idioms even slang (Eka & Lestari, 2013). This result of the present study lead to similar findings that students' critical thinking is positively activated by activities that have been done by English teachers. Students can judge the value of the song, connect the content of the song to the phenomena in their daily life, analyze what might composer would like to tell through music, and interpret the meaning of the song through its lyrics.

## **Conclusion**

The main conclusion that can be drawn is that teachers who integrate teaching listening through songs with critical thinking activities bring forth teaching critical listening. It would be a great idea for EFL teachers to apply and adapt these teaching steps. Critical thinking must be integrated into four language skills, as well as listening skills. It is compulsory to teach an integrated skill in

language learning and it is a novelty idea to integrate it with critical thinking skills. As educators, the expectation of leading students to be critical thinkers is undoubtedly denied. One way to achieve it is by cultivating, activating, and teaching critical thinking skills. It is important to note that the listening materials are not the only song. Podcasts, video essays, interview recordings, and weather forecasts are authentic materials which can be employed in teaching listening skills. The song as authentic material has benefits that are closed-link to students' real life. Yet, these authentic materials and created materials have a big possibility to be utilized and integrated with critical thinking skills. Thus, Future research should further develop and confirm these initial findings with the other listening materials.

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