

## **Communicative Learning Approach in Improving Students' Critical Thinking Skills**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The present research aims to assess the influence of the communicative approach on the cognitive abilities and linguistic competence of students. This study utilized a quasi-experimental approach, specifically adopting a pretest-posttest control group design. The research sample comprised 54 students in the tenth grade. The findings indicated a considerable improvement in the language proficiency of the students in the experimental group. The average score on the posttest increased by 18.7 points, from 60.2 to 78.9. The experimental group exhibited a substantial enhancement in their critical thinking abilities, with scores increasing from 51.38 to 83,04 in contrast to a lesser improvement shown in the control group. The data suggest that the communicative method is successful in strengthening students' language proficiency, as well as improving their critical thinking capabilities. Based on this study, it is recommended that the communicative approach be more extensively incorporated into the learning process. This would entail reinforcing teacher education, increasing infrastructure, and modifying the curriculum accordingly. The findings have significant use in formulating learning techniques in vocational schools, specifically in equipping students to confront workforce issues.

**Keywords:** Communicative Learning, Critical Thinking, Language Skills

### **INTRODUCTION**

Students' critical thinking skills in Indonesia are still relatively low (Ratnaningsih & Suyoto, 2019). One of the main factors that causes this is that the education system in Indonesia often applies learning that requires students to memorize and write answers according to what is stated in the printed book, not learning that hones students' ability to think critically (Sinaga et al., 2023). In other words, the education system in Indonesia is not fully in line with the goal of producing critical thinkers. This is also experienced by SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Bontoala Makassar which faces a particular challenge to ensure that its graduates have the technical skills required in the world of work as well as the language and critical thinking skills that are essential to face challenges around the world. It is no secret that the impact of labor recruitment in the digital era increases the number of unemployed. Based on BPS data, it is known that unemployment from universities is 6.31%. This is due to the low soft skills possessed by university graduates (Statistik, 2019).

Good language skills allow students to communicate well in a variety of professional contexts, both in Indonesian and the foreign language they are

studying. Conversely, critical thinking skills are essential to help students make decisions in the workplace and analyze information. This is in line with Ministerial Regulation No. 20 where students are expected to be able to activate critical reasoning in solving problems in various sciences as well as in everyday life. Also in line with the results of research (Irianto, 2017) that the challenges in this digital era required unique specific skills. People who highly likely to be able to survive are those who can think critically, who are able to collaborate to others in solving problems and create products, and also those who are creative, emotionally stable, reliable and persistence.

Inevitably, one of the causes of this situation is the development of technology and its rapid progress. Education has utilized technology in the school environment to help make the learning process effective and efficient, as well as the assessment process. However, it cannot be denied that the students' preoccupation with gadgets has reached a stage that is embarrassing. Because it is too sophisticated, students are accustomed to an instant process whether it is looking for answers to assignments or in the typing process. There are many applications that can answer all kinds of questions. It makes students not have to bother reasoning to find answers or elaborate thoughts into writing. Especially if we expect students to read many references to find an answer. That is becoming very rare today. Not only does it weaken students' ability in terms of reasoning, the use of technology today also weakens students' social skills both with teachers and peers Zahirah (2019) and (Dhiman, 2022).

Whereas one of the skills that must be developed in students is the ability to socialize and also think critically. Critical thinking is the ability used in deciding various information obtained logically and creatively, to be used in analyzing, evaluating, and making final conclusions. The objectives of critical thinking are: (1) understanding of a problem can be improved; (2) precise in choosing useful solutions; (3) avoid false beliefs; (4) minimize errors in making a decision; and (5) useful in selecting, assessing, and modifying new ideas (Ratnaningsih & Suyoto, 2019).

In critical thinking there are indicators that students must achieve. There are five indicators of critical thinking, namely providing simple explanations (elementary clarification), building basic skills (basic support), inferring (interference), making further explanations (advance clarification), and strategies and tactics. The reasons why critical thinking needs to be developed in 21st century learning are: (1) the demands of the times that require students to be able to use information, search, and choose the right solutions in life; (2) problem solving so that students are able to fairly compete well; (3) able to overcome various problems and choices by thinking critically. Critical thinking ability is a high-level thinking skill that must be familiarized and mastered by students in developing their cognitive abilities (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2018). Students need to be introduced to the way they can improve their critical thinking skills. It will help them later on in investigating and uncovering problems that will be encountered in their everyday life. One of which

is through the use of learning media that can improve students' critical thinking skills (Sari & Sugiyarto, 2015).

Communicative approach in language learning becomes very relevant for vocational schools because students are required to use their knowledge and skills in real situations. Indonesian language learning using the communicative approach makes students have language proficiency in this case speaking skills and reading skills (Asiah, 2016)(Muradi, 2014)(Laily, 2015). This approach focuses on the use of language in real communication, which can involve students in simulations, discussions, and other interactive activities that describe the work environment. This method not only improves students' speaking and writing skills, but also teaches them critical thinking in situations where they are required to interpret or respond to information given to them in a professional context.

The communicative approach created to achieving a goals or based on the idea that the ability to use language in communication, is to enable the learner using the language to communicate effectively. It appears that language is not only about rules, but more than that, language is a means of communication. This means that language is placed in accordance with its function, namely the function of communication. The communicative approach is proven to be an approach that changes the mindset of students in the skills of analyzing, synthesizing, solving problems, concluding and evaluating (Ratnaningsih dan Suyoto, 2019). The implementation of communicative approach is entirely conducted by the students (student center) while the teacher is only seen as a facilitator. Thus students will be expected to be able to use the language in many ways such as story telling, responding to problems, and expressing their opinions with coherent and easy-to-understand language.

Susanti and Wijayanti's study found that communicative techniques can significantly improve students' speaking ability (Wijayanti & Susanti, 2021). Students who actively participate in communicative activities tend to have the ability to express their opinions in a structured and coherent manner, which is a very important skill in the work environment. It is expected that by applying this method at SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Bontoala Makassar, students' language ability will be improved as well as critical thinking ability, which is very important for employment.

Operationally, there are 3 characteristics of the communicative approach, namely; 1. Communicative activities are presented to fulfill information gaps. 2. Meaningful learning activities. 3. The teacher acts as a facilitator so that the interaction between students can be directed. Examples of learning activities in the communicative approach are functional communication activities which consist of four things, namely processing information, various and processing information, sharing information with limited cooperation and social interaction activities consisting of six things, namely improvisation, funny short plays, various simulations, dialogue and role play, trial conversations and discussions, and debating.

The communicative approach can also be considered as an approach based on the nature of language. Basically, language is not science, it is a culture that acquired by using it over and over. It is not a science that the learner needs to focus on the details or theories. So that language teaching is directed at the use of language as a means of communication. The components of communication include elements of communication actors, ways of communicating, places of communication, and others.

SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Bontoala Makassar expects its graduates to be not only competent in their fields but also have soft skills in the form of language skills and critical thinking. Therefore, this research aims to learn how their language and critical thinking skills are. It is hoped that the results of this study will provide useful insights to develop better learning strategies that suit the needs of vocational students to face the world of work. The communicative approach is applied at SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Bontoala Makassar and how this method can help students improve their language skills.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Communicative Learning Approach towards Critical Thinking Skills**

The communicative approach aims to make speaking ability the ultimate goal in language teaching. Not only does it focus on students' understanding of grammar and interpretation, it also aims to master all four language skills, namely listening, reading, speaking and writing (Hendri, 2017). As is well understood, this approach emerged due to a sense of dissatisfaction with language teaching methods in the previous period that only focused on language theory. Students were busy learning language theory but failed to use the language itself. In fact, language is the ability to speak, read, listen and write or in other words, the skill of using language itself. There is no other way but to use a communicative approach because language is not to be learned in parts but to be applied in everyday life (Mariza & Mardiah, 2020). So communicative learning is language learning that allows learners to have adequate opportunities to develop language and demonstrate in language activities both productive and receptive activities in accordance with real situations, not artificial situations that are detached from the context (Rahmawati et al., 2016).

The communicative approach has long been recognized as an effective method in language teaching, focusing on the ability to use language meaningfully in real contexts. In recent decades, researchers have also begun to explore its potential for developing critical thinking skills among learners. This approach not only aims to teach language, but also equips students with the abilities of analysis, evaluation and reflection that are essential in today's globalized world (Richards, 2006). The communicative approach offers room for critical thinking as it emphasizes the use of language to solve problems, argue, and evaluate information in authentic situations (Fauzi & Basikin, 2020). Communicative competence involves four main components:

1. Grammar competence: Understanding of language structures.
2. Sociolinguistic Competence: Use of language according to social context.
3. Discursive Competence: Combining language elements into a cohesive discourse.
4. Strategic Competence: The ability to overcome communication barriers.

### **Communicative Teaching Approach and Critical Thinking Skills**

At first glance, the communicative approach and Critical Thinking are not related because the communicative approach is identical to the presence of the teacher to direct students in the learning process while critical thinking is identical to the process that students go through individually or alone. However, in the language learning process, the communicative approach has a close relationship with the development of critical thinking skills (Ratnaningsih & Suyoto, 2019) (Sinaga et al., 2023) (Winch, 2019). In the communicative approach, students are encouraged to actively do:

- a. Evaluate Information: Analyzing authentic texts, such as news articles or conversations, to identify the author's bias or purpose.
- b. Arguing Logically: Develop the ability to express opinions, give reasons, and defend arguments during discussions or debates.
- c. Problem Solving: Using language to complete complex tasks, such as case studies or simulations, that require strategic thinking.

Therefore, teachers in this case play a crucial role in designing materials and assessments in language skills learning. Richards (2006) identifies the main principles of the communicative approach that support the development of critical thinking:

1. Task-based Learning: Provide communicative tasks that require analysis and synthesis of information.
2. Use of Authentic Materials: Students interact with real-world materials, such as news reports or speeches, that trigger reflection and evaluation.
3. Collaborative Interaction: Group activities allow students to exchange ideas, provide feedback, and develop solutions together.

From the explanation above, it can be understood that the tasks given by the teacher to students are expected to be varied and promote language skills in designing, analyzing and processing information. Some teaching techniques that can be used are Debate and Discussion, Case Studies, Role Play and Simulation.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

### **Design and Samples**

This research was conducted using a quasi-experimental design. This design uses a pretest-posttest control group design. The researcher can evaluate the effect of communicative approach on students' critical thinking and language skills at SMK

Muhammadiyah 2 Bontoala Makassar. The experimental group will receive instruction through communicative approach, while the control group will receive instruction through conventional approach. All grade X students at SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Bontoala Makassar are the research subjects. The purposive sampling method was used to select the research sample. There were 54 students who participated in this study. The critical thinking test instrument was used to determine the effect of the communicative approach on students' language and critical thinking skills. The test was given twice, namely before the learning process (pretest) and after the entire series of learning was completed (posttest). The test questions used were in the form of descriptions. Critical thinking skills assessment strategies used in this study consisted of 10 strategies from 5 categories. Critical thinking skills assessment strategies are presented in Table 1.

*Tabel 1. Strategy of Critical Thinking Assessment*

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Strategies</b>
Giving simple explanation	Focusing on questions Analyzing arguments Asking and Answering questions
Assessing basic information	Considering credibility of a source Observing and considering the Observation Result
Drawing Conclusions	Making and Assessing Deductive Making and assessing the conclusions
Giving further Explanation	Identifying assumptions
Applying strategy in Solving Problems	Determining an action

The data obtained from the critical thinking skills test is used to determine the effect produced. To determine the increase in students' critical thinking skills, the data used is the gain score. Gain score (normalized gain or standard gain) is an analysis technique to determine the level of increase in student learning outcomes.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to determine how much influence SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Bontoala Makassar has. Data were collected from pretest and posttest of two groups. The experimental group was taught through communicative approach and the control group was taught through conventional approach.

*Tabel 2. The Average Score of Pretest and Posttest of Language Skills*

<b>Group</b>	<b>Pretest</b>	<b>Posttest</b>	
Experimental	60,2	78,9	18,7
Control	61,0	68,1	7,1

*Table 3. The Average Score Pretest and Posttest of Critical Thinking Skills*

<b>Group</b>	<b>Pretest</b>	<b>Posttest</b>	
EXperimental	51,38	83,04	31,6
Control	59,3	65,7	6,4

The pretest results showed that the experimental group's language skills had an average score of 60.2, while the experimental group's critical thinking skills had an average score of 51.38, while the control group had an average score of 59.3. The results showed that the initial language and critical thinking skills of both groups of students before the intervention were relatively balanced, with no significant difference between the two ( $p > 0.05$ ). It is important to ensure that any progress after the intervention is truly due to the learning methods used.

After seven weeks of using the communicative approach, the average value of language skills in the experimental group increased to 78.9, while the value of language skills in the control class only increased slightly to 68.1. Language skills and critical thinking ability were significantly different between the posttest results of the experimental and control groups ( $p < 0.05$ ). The results showed that students at SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Bontoala Makassar had better language and critical thinking skills by using the communicative approach. Students who were actively involved in communicative activities during learning had a greater likelihood of improving these skills than students in the control group. This was shown by an increase in the mean posttest score in the experimental group compared to the control group.

### **The Influence of Communicative Learning towards Critical Thinking Skills**

The experimental group showed a significant improvement in language skills. This explains that the communicative approach can be said to be effective in improving students' ability to express opinions. Previous studies have shown that a communicative approach that emphasizes the use of language in real situations helps students understand and use language better. By using this approach, students tend to be more confident in conveying concepts orally and in writing. They also tend to better understand what is being taught through the texts they read. Some types of exercises taught in the communicative approach in this study are:

1. Providing limited information. This is done with 2 types of activities: identifying pictures and finding pairs. The teacher asks students to ask open-ended questions about the topic being studied, stimulating their critical thinking.
2. Unrestricted information discovery. Students A and B each have a picture that is the same, except for a few parts. The students have to discuss the picture to find the differences. Another example is a teacher asking students to identify the main argument in a text, evaluate the evidence presented, and recognize the underlying assumptions.
3. Organizing information. Students are asked to imagine that they are going on a vacation abroad for two weeks. Each member can only bring approximately 20 kg

of luggage. The groups have to decide what they will bring, looking at the appropriate items given by the teacher, and prepare a response if the other groups challenge the idea. On other occasions the method used is that the teacher provides situations or problems that require students to think critically in understanding and formulating student problem solving.

The exercise is a practice of using language in communication activities. Interactive activities like this allow students to practice and strengthen their language skills in a real-world context. It also increases student engagement in the learning process, which is an important component in improving language skills (Wijayanti & Susanti, 2021). The communicative approach proved effective in improving students' critical thinking skills in addition to language skills. The significant improvement in critical thinking skills in the experimental group shows that this approach not only focuses on language acquisition but also builds critical thinking skills needed to analyze, evaluate, and conclude information well.

Communicative approaches allow students to engage in critical thinking processes through activities that require them to question information, construct arguments, and make decisions based on analysis. For example, group discussions and debates teach students to evaluate different points of view, spot bias, and build logical, fact-based arguments. There are five aspects of critical thinking skills tested in this study.

1. Provide a simple explanation
2. Building basic skills
3. Making inferences
4. Making further explanations
5. Making estimates and integration

Critical thinking skills assessment was conducted before learning (pretest) and after learning (posttest). The pretest aims to determine the initial ability of students while the posttest is given to determine the ability of students after following the learning process with a communicative approach. The results of critical thinking achievement data are as follows:

*Tabel 4. Result of Critical Thinking*

No	Indicator	Pretest		Posttest	
		Score	Category	Score	Category
1	Giving simple explanation	54,08	Tidak Tuntas	81,30	Tuntas
2	Building basic skills	53,40	Tidak Tuntas	83,25	Tuntas
3	Summarizing	49,01	Tidak Tuntas	82,08	Tuntas
4	Giving Further Explanation	51,05	Tidak Tuntas	83,60	Tuntas



5	Making Assumption	an	49,38	Tidak Tuntas	85,00	Tuntas
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Based on table 4, it is obtained that there is an increase in the score of each critical thinking indicator before and after learning by using a communicative approach. The increase in critical thinking skills can be seen from the N-Gain of critical thinking test scores ranging from 0.7-1. The N-Gain mode of the Critical Thinking test results of the test class students is in the high category, indicated by the increase in scores on the pretest and posttest. This shows that the application of learning using a communicative approach can improve students' critical thinking in language learning.

### **The Challenges in Applying Communicative Teaching Approach in SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Bontoala Makassar**

Although the research findings show that the communicative approach has many benefits, there are some problems when using it at SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Bontoala Makassar. One of them is the lack of resources, including facilities that support interactive learning. In addition, teachers do not receive adequate training to implement this method. In addition, large class sizes can also hinder this method. This happens because it is difficult to give enough attention to each student in communicative activities. Nevertheless, the findings of this study make a significant contribution to building better learning strategies at SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Bontoala Makassar. It is expected that the communicative approach can be applied more widely and effectively with increased teacher training and adequate facility support. More students will feel the benefits in the development of language and critical thinking skills.

### **CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effect of communicative method on critical thinking ability and language skills of students at SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Bontoala Makassar. The results of the study yielded the following conclusions: First, it was proven that the communicative approach successfully improved students' language skills. In the experimental group, students' language skill scores increased by 18.7 points from 60.2 in the pretest to 78.9 in the posttest. On the other hand, the students' language skills scores in the control group only increased by 7.1 points from 61.0 in the pretest to 68.1 in the posttest. These results show that, compared to the conventional approach, the communicative approach improved language skills significantly. Second, the communicative approach improved students' critical thinking skills. In the experimental group, the average critical thinking ability score increased by 31.6 points from 51.34 in the pretest to 83.04 in the posttest. Meanwhile, the control group score only increased by 6.4 points from 59.3 in the pretest to 65.7 in the posttest. This large increase shows that the communicative method helps to master language and critical thinking skills which are very important.

To integrate the communicative approach more widely into the learning process, this study suggests further development in teacher training, provision of adequate facilities, and curriculum adjustment. ASMK Muhammadiyah 2 Bontoala Makassar is expected to continue improving the quality of its education, especially in terms of improving speaking and critical thinking skills. This research is expected to make a significant contribution to the educational literature, especially in relation to how effective the communicative approach is in vocational education in Indonesia. The results of this study are expected to serve as a reference for other schools and education policy makers to implement this approach to improve essential skills among students.

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