

“ ‘Doing Philosophy’ As an Approach to Enhance Thinking Skills Among Students in an Islamic University ”



Norillah Abdullah

norillahabdullah@gmail.com

Rosnani Hashim

rosnani@iium.edu.my



© TV SMITH

<http://www.iium.edu.my/>









جمال الدين عبدالرحمن
www.tembeling.com

Statement problem

- existing educational system over emphasizes the results of public examinations as the main criteria to enter universities and also as a guideline to assign students to their field of studies cause schools to focus their attention upon teaching for the sake of examination (Rosnani, 2005)

- bright students are associated with those who can master and memorize facts and are able to regurgitate them during the examination and scoring high scores for their good memory.
- Those who depart from the mainstream and tend to be more creative or more artistic are rejected and looked down upon and sometimes to the extent of being punished.
- The system does not allow for greater inter-personal skills, thus students' lack of communication skills and articulation of their views

- Thinking skills are essential and crucial especially in the present globalized world in which information can easily be accessed and obtained without any limitation and boundaries.
- Therefore, a critical mind is indispensable for students in order to analyse, evaluate, discriminate, distinguish and discard information, which is false and unreliable.
- Critical and analytical mind will help to filter information so that only the true, reliable and relevant information will be accepted.
- Moreover, a person who is critical will develop high self-confidence in his life.

Teaching Thinking Approaches

- many well-known approaches that are available for teaching thinking such as ‘Lateral Thinking’ by De Bono, ‘Instrumental Enrichment Programme’ by Reuven Feuerstein and also ‘Philosophy for Children Programme’ (P4C) by Matthew Lipman
- The researcher decided to employ Philosophical Inquiry (PI) approach as her study focus due to its ability to meet unique criteria which are relatively lacking in other teaching thinking programmes, namely transferability, flexibility, morality, suitability and durability.

- A lot of studies have been done in the West which shows that the PI approach helps in enhancing thinking and reasoning skills among school children
- Most of the previous studies that had been conducted in the West and in Malaysia applied only to children at the school levels and very limited study conducted among the university students.

Objective of study

- to discover whether this approach could help to improve critical thinking and self-confidence among Muslims and in particular, undergraduate students from the Faculty of Islamic and Human Sciences.
- For this reason, this study attempted to answer the following research questions:-
 - Do students' assignments show improvement in their thinking skills?
 - How do the students view the PI programme for thinking?

Methodology

- This study employed the *qualitative research method*.
- The subjects were selected among the IIUM undergraduate students from the Faculty of Islamic and Human Sciences taking the Creative Thinking and Problem Solving Course (RKGS 2010)
- The students were selected on a voluntary basis and were divided into two groups A and B

- Group A was taught using the PI, and group B was taught using the regular formal critical thinking course
- The first group consisted of 17 students while the second group consisted of 12 students.
- The reading material used for the PI group, were excerpts from the novels “*Mark*” (Lipman, 1986) which focused on the area of social experiences which students face in their everyday lives and the second novel on “*Harry Stottlemeier’s Discovery*” (Lipman, 1985) which emphasized the acquisition of formal and informal logic.

- Data was collected from the students' assignments, interviews, and also journal entries.
- As for the assignment, students were given an article taken from a local English daily, the New Straits Times (2007, March, 1) on "Brain-dead man 'robbed' of organs, causing outcry". They were asked to read the article critically and to give their reasons and arguments to support their answers based on these questions:
 - *Should there be payment for human's organs? (Identified as question 1).*
 - *Is it right for the doctor to determine the patient's death by turning off the life support machine? (Identified as question 2).*

Analysis and Discussion

- Analysis from the students' assignments for question one and two show that, the type of reasons given by both groups did not show any clear difference among them. They were not yet able to elaborate and explain their answers deeply and thoroughly.
- However, it is found that those from the PI group was able to transfer more critical thinking skills learned in their answers compared to the FCT group. This shows that the PI group was able to acquire more critical thinking disposition in them and transfer that in their writing through the skills which were not realised having been taught to them indirectly.

- In terms of the journal entries written by the students, it is found that the PI group was more narrative and elaborative in their writing. They were able to write almost twice the amount written by the FCT group.
- They described their own experience and perception of attending the class and the issues discussed during the class discussion which included arguments, views and also their reasoning on certain issues discussed as compared to the FCT group whose writings were emphasized more on the specific contents and skills learned in the class.

- Responses from the students' interviews and journal entries, showed that the PI group enjoyed the PI class and admitted that they felt the changes in their thinking and self-confidence after joining the programme. Even though, this programme was conducted only for 12 hours, but students could experience many changes and improvements in them. They became more critical in their thinking and felt more confidence as compared to before they joined the programme. Some of the responses given by the PI group are:

- Student 1: ...*“this thinking course class teach me to think more and deeper and also critically, not only just stand at the idea that we can see”*
- Student 3: *Honestly, when I enter this course, I can feel the differences in a way I think. Before this, I just look at an issue into the surface only. But now, I manage to see it beyond the surface*
- Student 4: *“This course teaches me much more on how to think well and how to organize my answer in answering questions”*
- Student 5: *“What can I learn from this class, the more arguments and suggestion, the more we think and try to find other good reason”*
- Student 6: *“I realized that thinking skill is silently developing through the discussion...We try to make good reasoning out of the event we are discussing...”*

- Besides that, they also acquired many other skills like communication skill, giving reasons, asking questions, making clarification, debating, leadership, solving problems and also learning to respect and listen to other peoples' views. All these skills were developed in them from classroom discussion in the PI class which encourages the active involvement of the students instead of the emphasis on the contents to be delivered as in the regular classrooms.

- From students' responses, after attending this programme, they realized the critical thinking skills and potential that they have in them. These can be seen from some of their responses:
- Student 1 : *I learn reasoning skill, clarification skill, critical thinking skill, debating skill, justification skill, creative thinking skills, leadership skills. It also encourage me to give my own view and opinion in the discussion*
- Student 2: *this class teach me to think, give opinion, do discussion, ask question, find solution and others . . . From this passage, I can see that, we can give opinion and ask more clarification or elaboration if we do not satisfy with something or discussion*

Conclusion

- Based on the students' qualitative response, students felt the changes in their way of thinking and also their self-confidence even though within the period of 12 hours. This shows that the PI approach could help to improve critical thinking and self-confidence among undergraduate students of Islamic Sciences specialization. It seems to be a more enjoyable approach as compared to regular classes which students attend at the university. Thus, the Islamic university

The End

Thank You