EFL teacher beliefs in boosting students' critical thinking

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The urgency of teaching critical thinking skills to the students currently cannot be neglected. The teacher holds essential role to prepare them to have great soft skills for their future lives. No matter what they want to be or what discipline of knowledge they want to emphasize, the ability to think critically will be beneficial for them. Hence, this paper aims to dig up teacher beliefs about the notion of critical thinking and how to teach it to the students. This research focused on EFL teachers of secondary level in Indonesia, particularly in Malang. The criteria of the subject elected in the study is based on two aspects. First, they are teaching English on secondary level in Malang in. Second, at least they have two years of teaching experience of English and have joined training/workshop to develop their professional aspect, particularly in improving students' critical thinking skills. By utilizing questionnaire and interview to collect the data, the results demonstrated that: (1) there are 85% of respondents believe in the importance of teaching critical thinking skills in secondary school area. (2) EFL teachers believed that it is very crucial for the teachers themselves to have the ability to think critically before teaching to their students, (3) they believed that by providing numerous activities such as debate, avoiding 'lecturing', problem solving and others could boost the students' thinking skills.

Keywords: Critical thinking, teacher beliefs, students

INTRODUCTION

Enhancing the quality of teaching has become the subject of significant discussion in teacher education (Sahin & Yildirim, 2016). It, of course, links to the role of the teachers themselves. It is also believed that the teacher played a significant role as the mediator in the language classroom (Horwitz, 2002). In addition, the existence of interaction is undoubtedly urgent. Moreover, the interaction in the target language is regarded as an integral part of the learning process. Thus, teacher should be aware that the way he/she interacts in the classroom will have the impact on what will occur then. What is more, a constructivist view of learning believed that learners are engaged in actively making sense of the information given to them. In other word, they tend to learn and engage in the classroom about what they think is more valuable and meaningful for them.

Within classroom interaction, surely, it will refer to a number of activities selected by the teacher. Of course, it also included the process of questioning and answering from both students and teacher. (Caram & Davis, 2005) argued that teacher-initiated questions enable to enhance students' learning through developing students critical thinking skills, reinforcing their understanding, correcting students misunderstanding, providing feedback for them, and enlivening class discussion.

In short, the skillful use of questioning enables to enhance students 'learning and improve students' performance. Moreover, the way the teacher draws the question to the students really affects the students' response or participation (Farahian & Rezaee, 2012). Their study evidenced that the teachers' low experience plays an important role in asking such question and it might lead to the learner to keep silent and reluctant to participate in the classroom.

Arguably, the ability to question correctly and effectively should be ideally owed by every single teacher. Some studies about how the teachers draw the questions to the students in classroom have been concerned by a number of researchers, such as (Fadhlullah & Ahmad, 2017; Maghsodi, 2010; Milawati & Suryati, 2019), and so on. Fadhlullah & Ahmad (2017) argued that questioning techniques is regarded as the most effective strategy to enhance one' critical thinking skills. Hence, it is inevitably crucial for the teacher to master the ability of finding problems to solve and construct questions to answer (Caram & Davis, 2005). Furthermore, (Maghsodi, 2010) believed that the way the teacher give question influences the way student explore the discourse pattern. His study on three non-native speaker (NNS) pre-service English teacher shows that yes/no question and closed and displayed question mostly appeared while open and referential questions do not. As a result, the responses given by the students were commonly brief and syntactically simple.

Nevertheless, apart from exploring the teacher from the aspect of their strategies, experience, and professional development, their beliefs and practices are important aspect to investigate as well (Rohmah & Nur Santi, 2020). The notion of teacher beliefs has a particular relationship with the teaching practice in the classroom. Nespor, 1987; Schoenfeld, 1983 cited in (Borg, 2005) has shown that individual beliefs will play crucial role in terms of appraisal and acceptance or rejection of new information and memory processes such as the retrieval and reconstruction of an event. The terms of teacher beliefs are sometimes called as the teacher perception, perspective, or even cognition. It depends on the researchers themselves to choose which term and definition they used in their research. However, in this study, I will use the term beliefs and practices which are called as teacher cognition by (Nishimuro & Borg, 2013).

Teacher cognition refers to what the teachers think, know, and believe and the relationships of these mental constructs to what the teachers do in the language classroom (Nishimuro & Borg, 2013). In his paper, he created a schematic conceptualization about teaching process which exposes the crucial role of teacher cognition in teachers' lives. He also classified this term into three big themes, namely (1) cognition and prior language learning experience, (2) cognition and teacher education, and (3) cognition and classroom practice. To sum up, there is a particular connection between the way the teachers teach the students in the classroom and how the teachers' background of experience and education are. Furthermore, mainstream educational research in the last 25years has recognized the impact of teacher cognition on teachers' professional lives,

and it has generated a substantial body of research. (Nishimuro & Borg, 2013) To sum up, teacher belief is significant and influential aspect to investigate by a couple of scholars.

Connecting with that, there are several studies concerning on how teacher beliefs are exposed in some topic areas by a number of researchers (Dwee et al., 2016; Fitriyah, 2020; Massa, 2014; Rohmah & Nur Santi, 2020) and others. As a consequence, this present study comes up to complete the drawbacks of the previous one. In terms of the participants, mostly the researcher focused on the teachers in university level or we can call them as the lectures. Only one of the studies emphasized on the teachers in primary school. Thus, this study is intended to fill the gap from the participant's selection's view. As a result, this research is conducted to focus on the teachers in secondary school. Afterward, the researcher's consideration in selecting critical thinking skill is due to the crucial notion which is urgently needed by the students. Besides, there is still few studies exploring teacher's beliefs about students' critical thinking skills. In conclusion, this research is conducted to examine teachers' belief and in promoting students' critical thinking skills at secondary school.

Above all, this study is conducted to answer the question: What are EFL teachers' beliefs about promoting students' critical thinking skill?

METHODS

The idea of the methods used to delve the teacher beliefs are quite challenging (Birello, 2012). He mentioned that the only way we can do is by getting the teachers to tell and explain what they believe or investigating their works in which their beliefs are implied. In this present study, the researcher focused on exposing EFL teachers with the different level of experience and background at secondary schools in Malang. As a consequence, a mixed method was employed as the design of this present study for the sake of achieving those objectives. Mixed methods design is a set of procedure to collect, analyze, and "mixing" both quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study or a series of studies to understand a research problem (Klassen, 2012).

More specifically, the explanatory sequential design was incorporated as the type of the mixed method research. In this type, the researcher collected data in two phases. At first phase, the quantitative data was collected in sequence. Afterward, it was followed by collecting secondary qualitative data. Klassen (2012) argued that the quantitative and results aims to provide general pictures of the research problems; research analysis, whereas qualitative data collection is needed to refine, extend, or explain those general pictures.

The participants of this research were EFL teachers of secondary level in Malang city, Indonesia. What is meant by EFL teachers in this study is the teachers who are teaching English in secondary level (read: SMP (Sekolah Menengah

Pertama) and MTs (Madrasah Tsanawiyah) for both state and private secondary schools in Malang area. The criteria of the subject elected in the study is based on three aspects. First, they are teaching English on secondary level in Malang in. Second, at least they have two years of teaching experience of English and have joined training/workshop to develop their professional aspect, particularly in improving students' critical thinking skills.

Further, the teachers in this setting were selected to be the subject of the study because of some considerations. First, Malang is well-known as education city which have many great educational institutions either from elementary, secondary or even university level. Second, schools in Malang was frequently used as the trial of some policy from Ministry of Education and Culture, such as full-day school and others. Third, the teachers in Malang were often trained in some seminar or workshops to improve their competence in teaching. Hence, based on those reasons, the researcher believed that selecting English teachers in Malang is appropriate and might bring the richer data to analyze.

To collect the data, the researcher conducted several phases. For sure, the researcher used some instruments in collecting the data. At the first phase, the researcher distributed the questionnaire to the participants in the form of Google docs and share in WHATSAPP group of "MGMP Bahasa Inggris" in Malang city. It was done to gain the general data of teachers' profile, the level of experience as well as the general beliefs and practices of promoting students' critical thinking skills in classroom settings.

Apart from that, the researcher continued the second phase by conducting semi-structured interview for some teachers having different experience level to gain more details about their beliefs and practices of promoting students' critical thinking skill. In the process of interview, the researcher used voice recording to record the whole process. Afterward, the researcher transcribed the result of interview from those teachers. It was conducted as the follow up from the result of questionnaire before.

Meanwhile, to analyze the data, the researcher conducted several steps. First of all, the researcher tabulated the result of questionnaire from the respondents. The result explored the general description about teachers' background, their belief and practices. Afterward, the researcher transcribed the result of semi-structure interview of teachers. The transcript of interview was analyzed and related with the result of questionnaire based on the findings from the previous studies. This was the phase of confirming and elaborating the teacher's profile, knowledge about critical thinking skills and the practice in the classroom.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In terms of teacher beliefs in promoting students' critical thinking skills, the results of the study lead to three points for further discussion addressed as follows.

The Importance of Promoting Students' Critical Thinking Skills

The result of both qualitative and quantitative data is supported each other. Regarding the prior language experience, the findings indicated that most of the respondent have more than 15 years teaching experience (59 %). If we sum up, the teachers dominantly have more than ten years of teaching experience (81 %). Meanwhile, the participants having less than 10 years in teaching experience is only 19 %. Form this finding we can conclude that most of the participants have the prior experience in teaching.

In addition, in terms of the quantitative data obtained in the present study, it demonstrates that there are 85.1 % of respondents believe in the importance of teaching critical thinking skills in school circumstance. Specifically, 37.0 % of the respondents assumed that stimulating critical thinking skills is important for their students. Meanwhile, 14.8 % respondents think that it is less important and no one (0 %) stated that it not important, Figure 1.
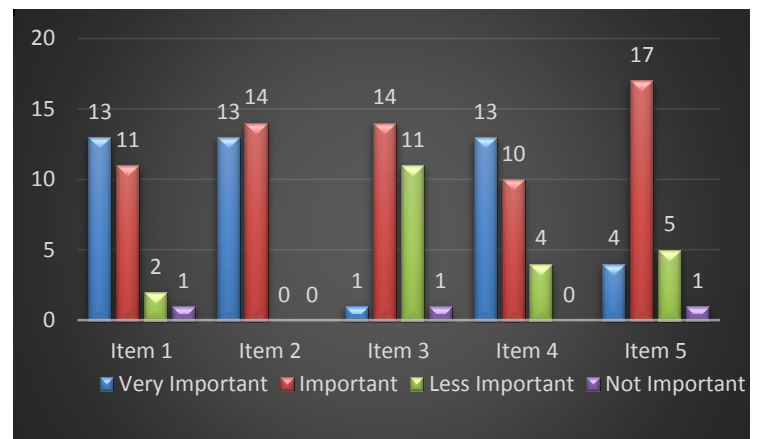

FIGURE 1 | The Chart of Respondents

Connecting with that, the respondents consider that the idea of promoting critical is very crucial to be implemented in the classroom for the sake of preparing students in their real life later on. The teacher believed that by teaching critical thinking skills in the classroom, the students will get some advantages. The detailed benefits that will be obtained according to the teacher belief are exposed below.

The teacher has strong beliefs that teaching critical thinking skills for students will be beneficial to make them able to face and take decision toward the problems they have. This kind of benefits are related to the students' ability to overcome the problems by themselves. Moreover, this skill is not only helpful to strengthen them whey there are in troubles. However, it is going to be the tool for them to always see something critically from all aspects.

Also, the teacher believed that promoting critical thinking is very essential because it can train them how to be more open-minded students. The teaching process at school should also be able to prepare them have some soft life skills, particularly critical thinking skills. Because this kind of skill do not stop as the art of the way of thinking.

However, it deals with the practice they implement in the real circumstance. As a result, they will be accustomed to overcome their problems or even others' problem. These are confirmed in the report by (Saavedra et al., 2012) regarding the reason why these skills are urgent to have.

Besides, the teacher believed that by teaching their students how to think critically, not only their critical thinking which is getting improver. However, it can motivate students to learn well and improve their attitude, knowledge and skill. In addition, this kind of skill is also beneficial for them since it can grow other important aspect of students called creativity and innovation. The connection between critical thinking skills and creativity deals with a study conducted by (Cavus & Uzunboylu, 2009) highlighting that students' creativity could improve significantly as well as their critical thinking skills. Moreover, the benefits of critical thinking skill do not lie on the academic aspect, but also in non-academic aspect, especially in terms of attitude (character building).

These finding also deals with the theory proposed by (Borg, 2003) that cognition or beliefs have the connection with learning experience. From the data we could see that the teachers are considered as experienced teacher in teaching English. It also reflects on how they believe about particular thing, in this case in 'promoting students critical thinking skill'. Both quantitative and qualitative data are in a positive-vibes.

Afterward, the result of study which is in the form of qualitative data is presented as well as the quantitative data in order to strengthen and make the findings more comprehensive. The findings of qualitative data were interpreted into a number of excerpts as follows:

Berpikir kritis sangat penting bagi siswa untuk menghadapi dan mengambil keputusan atas segala permasalahan dengan tepat. (Critical thinking is very crucial for students to face and take decision of all of the problems accurately).
[DH]

This excerpt showed that the teachers have strong beliefs about the importance of promoting critical thinking skills for students in learning process. They argued that this skill is urgent to teach and train for the sake of being able to face any problem and take particular decision in students' life. Here, the teachers tried to give more insight on the advantages of having critical thinking skill for the students. This kind of skill will be very beneficial to prepare students' real life, particularly when the problems come on them. As a result, the teachers here already had awareness about the notion of critical thinking skills and how it brings betterment and benefits in our daily situation. It was also mentioned by another respondent in the excerpt below.

Bahwa membelajarkan siswa berpikir kritis melalui proses pembelajaran itu sangat penting untuk dilakukan. (Teaching the students how to think critically through learning process is very important to do)
[GDU]

In addition, another finding obtained from APR gives the same idea about how important critical thinking skills for students as well as how beneficial it is for students' life. Also, it brings idea on how it deals with the real life on the students later on. Here is the excerpt:

Berpikir kritis sangat berguna bagi bekal hidup masa depan siswa kita. Jadi apabila saat sekolah diajarkan, akan sangat membantu siswa/i belajar utk berpikir kritis tentang masalah2 kehidupanny. (Critical thinking is very beneficial to prepare the students' future. If it is taught at school, it will be so much helpful for students to learn how to critically think about their life's problems).
[APR]

APR thought that critical thinking skills is really urgent to teach at school because there will be a lot of benefits gotten by the students later on, especially when they are in troubles. This art of thinking will help the students so much in their future's life. For sure, this skill is not only helpful to strengthen them whey there are matters. However, it is going to be the tool for them to always see something critically from all aspects. Additionally, RDN explains other beliefs about the benefits of teaching critical thinking in the excerpt below:

Pengajaran berfikir kritis bisa membantu siswa untuk berpikiran lebih terbuka dan mampu menyelesaikan masalah sebagai bekal life skill mereka nanti. (Teaching critical thinking could help students to be more open minded and able to overcome problems as life skill provision for them in the future).
[RDN]

This excerpt presents another benefit believed by the teachers that could be gained through the process of teaching critical thinking skills. RDN stated that by promoting critical thinking skills to the students, it could train them to be open minded people and be helpful for them to learn how to overcome troubles they will face in the future. This skill is believed enables to be provision to prepare the students in their real life.

The Roles of Teachers in Promoting Students' Critical Thinking Skill

The finding outlines that there are a number of beliefs held by participants in terms of the roles of teachers in promoting students' critical thinking skills. The first is the belief that the teacher themselves should have the competence to have the ability to think critically. It is such as the requirements that is believed by the respondents that should be fulfilled at the first before training the students to think critically. This data reveals that the teachers do not only have belief about the importance of teaching critical thinking skills to the students. However, it also emphasizes the belief in how important the role of teachers to have critical thinking skills at first. These have been demonstrated as well in a report by (Seeger et al., 2018). It can be seen from the excerpt below:

Pengajaran berpikir kritis kepada siswa sangat penting dan bisa terlaksana jika guru sudah bisa berpikir kritis dan mengupayakan berbagai cara untuk menumbuhkan berpikir kritis siswa di dalam pembelajaran. Berpikir kritis bisa diasah dan dilatihkan kepada siswa dengan berbagai kegiatan yang dimodifikasi oleh guru.

(Teaching critical thinking for students is very important and can be carried out if the teachers can think critically and do several ways to improve students' critical thinking skill in learning process. Critical thinking skill can be trained for the students by providing activities modified by the teachers)
[EEI]

From the further explanation brought by one of the participants, there is one point highlighted for the very first place that is about teachers' belief about the competence of teachers themselves to have the ability to think critically. It is such as the requirements that should be fulfilled at the first before training the students to think critically. This data reveals that the teachers do not only have belief about the importance of teaching critical thinking skills to the students. However, it shows the belief about the role of teachers themselves to have this ability at first.

Instead of having competence to think critically themselves, the respondents also believe that the teachers have roles provide various activities that can train the students to be critical thinkers. They have strong beliefs that critical thinking skill can be taught, promote, and trained to the student through particular activities modified by the teachers. In sum, the role of the teachers before promoting their students to be critical thinking is making sure that they have already the competence to be critical thinkers.

Furthermore, the same idea is also brought by another participant namely SI. Here is the excerpt:

Kemampuan berpikir kritis siswa dapat meningkat jika guru membuat siswa berfikir. (The competence of students' critical thinking skills can be improved if the teacher can make the students able to think)
[SI]

In addition, the respondents also believe that the teachers have roles to provide various activities that can train the students to be critical thinkers. They have strong beliefs that critical thinking skill can be taught, promote, and trained to the student through particular activities modified by the teachers. In sum, the role of the teachers before promoting their students to be critical thinking in the classroom is making sure that they have already the competence to be critical thinkers.

As well as the previous findings, the participant also emphasizes the importance of teachers' role to make the students critical. The respondents stated that if the teacher could make the student think systematically and analytically, the students' ability to critically thinking can be improved. Again, the points highlighted here is to ensure that teacher have an ability and are ready to teach their students how to

be critical thinkers. It is similar with the study by (Caram & Davis, 2005) who believes that it inevitably crucial for the teacher to master the ability of finding problems to solve and construct questions to answer.

Another role of teachers believed by respondent is the teacher should have the ability to stimulate the students to think in order. She believed that it is one of the recommendations that could be done by the teachers to foster students' critical thinking skill. When the teacher can design the activities that could stimulate the way students think in systematic way, the respondent believed that the students can develop their competence to think critically. Above all, the result of the current study is in line with what Williams & Burden (1997) argued previously regarding the importance of teachers' role.

As well as the prior datum, this recent data reveal that the participant also emphasizes the same point that is about the teachers' competence to think critically before they teach them how to do it. Hence, it is believed that the role of the teachers to have the ability to think critically becomes one of the important aspects to make the students improve their critical thinking skills. Surely, stimulating the students to be able to think is done through several methods or ways designed by the teachers themselves. It enables to see from the following excerpt:

Ketika guru merancang kegiatan yang menstimulasi siswa berpikir secara bertingkat, siswa akan bisa terasah kemampuan berpikir kritisnya. (When the teachers construct the activities stimulating student to think in order, students' critical thinking skills will be fostered)
[EEI]

This excerpt outlines another role of teachers to have the ability to stimulate the students to think in order. She believed that it is one of the recommendations that could be done by the teachers to foster students' critical thinking skill. This finding tends to be technically aspect. If the prior findings has the tendency to have the ability to think critically in the first, this current datum begins to touch the area of practices of promoting critical thinking skills for the students in classroom situation. Dealing with that, those all findings are actually connected each other. The teachers' competence to think critically is related to their ability to stimulate their students.

The Strategies in Promoting Students' Critical Thinking Skills

Other point got from teacher is about the beliefs on the strategies or activities that can help teacher promote critical thinking skills for the students. Hence, the strategies believed by the teacher that could help students improve their critical thinking skills can be drawn as follows. According to the data obtained in quantitative way, the first technique or strategy believed is by using problem-based solving. It is also further explained by the respondent qualitatively below.

The first technique or strategy believed is by using problem-based solving. Here is the explanation from RDN.

Di kelas bisa menggunakan aktifitas belajar seperti problem solving, misalnya menemukan solusi untuk isu2 masalah di lingkungan sekolah dan rumah. (In the classroom, the teachers could use learning activities named problem solving to find out the solutions of some issues or problems in school or house circumstances) [RDN]

This datum mentioned that the teacher believed that problem solving activities could be implemented in the classroom to train the students to be critical thinkers. By doing this activity, the teacher will lead the students to be able to overcome the problems appeared in the closest circle, such as at their house or the school. The teacher could facilitate the students by providing the problem or probably make them find by themselves and think about the solution that they could propose to resolves the matters raised.

Furthermore, the teachers also believed that we should try to minimize the traditional way of teaching called 'lecturing'. From the statement, the teacher thinks that lecturing is actually still okay. However, we should decrease the portion of 'lecturing' and combine into the activities which could stimulate the way the students think of. The students need to be directed to have the ability to process some information that comes up in their mind and try to connect it as the whole information. Surely, the teachers here should provide more insights as the supporting ideas to make the students more skillful to discuss and process particular matters or information. This description could be viewed from the excerpt as follows:

Minimalkan ceramah, ceramah dikombinasikan dengan aktivitas yang menstimulasi berpikir siswa. Memberikan akses/stimulasi wawasan pendukung untuk sampai pada kemampuan membuat koneksi atas beberapa informasi.

(Minimizing lecturing, it is combined with activities stimulating students' thoughts. Giving access/stimulant regarding the supporting insights to pursue the competence of making connection of some information. [H]

The teacher believed that problem solving activities could be implemented in the classroom to train the students to be critical thinkers. By doing this activity, the teacher will lead the students to be able to overcome the problems appeared in the closest circle, such as at their house or the school. The teacher could facilitate the students by providing the problem or probably make them find by themselves and think about the solution that they could propose to overcome the problems come up.

Furthermore, the teachers also believed that we should try to minimize the traditional way of teaching called 'lecturing'. From the statement, the teacher thinks that lecturing is actually still okay. However, we should decrease the portion of 'lecturing' and combine into the activities which could stimulate the way the students think of. The students need to be directed to have the ability to process some information that comes up in their mind and try to connect it as the whole information.

Moreover, DEP has strong belief about the urgency of making the teaching and learning process in the classroom to be student-centered rather than teacher-centered. The beliefs that the activities should be student-centered here is extremely connected with the prior data. Student-centered focuses more on the activities which try to maximize students; competence to show up, think out of the box and to not much rely on the teachers. The teacher here is only as facilitator and mediator for them in the process of learning. That's why, the idea of students-centered really makes sense and connect with the efforts of stimulating students to be critical thinkers. These confirm what Lai (2011) believed that the teacher should teach how to transfer new contexts, and to use operative learning methods and constructivist approach that brings students as the center of learning process.

Further, activities which are in the form of discussion are also believed as the effective way to promote students' critical thinking skill. By conducting discussion in the classroom, they students will be trained to able to deliver their arguments toward some topics raised. The teachers will give freedom for the students to express what there are thinking about particular issues raised by their teacher. From the process of discussion, they will also try to view others' opinion.

Surely, by conducting discussion in the classroom, the students are forced to be more active to share their insights or arguments toward particular issue. Besides, the respondent believed that the students enable to learn how to appreciate someone's opinion. As we could see that in the process of discussion there will be many arguments delivered by several people and it does not guarantee that the perception will be the same. The ability to appreciate other point of view could be trained through promoting students' critical thinking skills. It supports the study by ([Dwee et al., 2016](#)).

Additionally, the respondent also believed that the teacher should provide more activities which give students more chance to learn how to give argument or opinion toward some issues. The portion of arguing activities in the classroom should be done in longer time. Again and again, this idea still has the connection with the prior finding. Giver more times to argue actually deals with the notion of student-centered itself. What the participant believed is presented in the excerpt below.

CONCLUSION

All in all, EFL teacher beliefs about promoting students' critical thinking skill are derived into three categories those are (1) The importance of teaching critical thinking skills, (2) The roles of teachers in promoting students' critical thinking skills, and (3) The strategies in promoting students' critical thinking skills.

In the first category, the teachers have strong beliefs that it is very important to promote critical thinking skills for the students. Specifically, there are 85,1 % of respondents

believe in the importance of teaching critical thinking skills in school circumstance. In addition, the second category is broken down into two beliefs: (1) The competence of teachers themselves to have the ability to think critically is very crucial to have at the very first place. (2) Teachers' ability to provide various activities that can train the students to be critical thinkers.

Additionally, the last category which is about the beliefs of effective strategies to promote students' critical thinking skills results in several ways. The first technique or strategy believed is by using problem-based solving. The second is minimizing the traditional way of teaching called 'lecturing'. The third is making the teaching and learning process as student-centered rather than teacher-centered. Fourth, discussion and debate are also believed as the effective way to promote students' critical thinking skill. Fifth, providing more activities which give students more chance to learn how to give argument or opinion toward some issues.

After portraying the conclusion of the present study, the suggestion is given for the future researchers as well. The future researchers having the same topic interest is recommended to have the deeper analysis in the realm of teacher beliefs and practices. The first recommendation is by involving the students as well as the teachers in the process of collecting data to have the more detailed and rich data to analyze. Secondly, it will be much better to have direct observation to dig up how the practices of promoting students' critical thinking skills. Since this study is conducted in pandemic situation, this study cannot add observation as well to collect the data. Third, using other method and theory is also welcomed to have more various results of the study, particularly in the topic of teacher belief and practices.

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