

## **Socratic Questions Used by the Sixth Semester Students of English Department of FKIP Nommensen in Seminar Class**

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**Abstract:** *The objectives of this study are to find out the kinds of socratic questions used by the sixth semester students of English Department of FKIP Nommensen in seminar class and to find out the dominant one. The research design is a descriptive qualitative research by applying a case study approach. Descriptive analysis is used as a problem solving procedure on the served things by describing the research objects when the research is done based on the facts found. The data of the research are the students' questions while the seminar is going on. To get the data accurately, they are collected by recording the dialogue using audio-visual when they were presenting their proposals in the class. After collecting the data, the writer used the technical steps of analyzing the data as follows: 1) transcribe the dialogue, 2) identify the socratic questions, 3) classify the type of question based on the socratic question, and 4) count the occurrence of each type. After analyzing the data, the writer found that there are 8 kinds of socratic questions used by the students. Question about Viewpoint does not exist while the presentation is going on. The most dominant one is questions that probe information, reasons, evidence, and causes.*

**Keywords:** *Socratic question, Seminar, Critical thinking*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Seminar is generally a form of academic instruction, either at a university or offered by a commercial or professional organization. It has the function of bringing together small groups for recurring meetings, focusing each time on some particular subjects, in which everyone present is requested to actively participate.

Seminar course focuses on generating, understanding and practicing the language needed to actively participate in lectures, seminars, or study groups and also explores how to plan, prepare and present academic content in seminars and via presentations. There will be a particular emphasis on speaking about and presenting one's work, both in small discussion settings and more formal or public contexts.

Socratic seminar is a method to try to understand information by creating a dialogue in class in regards to a specific text. Participants seek deeper understanding of complex ideas in the text through careful listening and rigorously thoughtful dialogue. After examining a text, students pose several kinds of questions, primarily open-ended, world connection, universal theme, and literary analysis questions. Such questions allow students to think critically, analyze multiple meanings in texts, and express ideas with clarity and confidence.

The purpose of a Socratic Seminar is to achieve a deeper understanding about the ideas and values in a text. In the Seminar, participants systematically question and examine issues and principles related to a particular content, and articulate different points-of-view. The group

conversation assists participants in constructing meaning through disciplined analysis, interpretation, listening, and participation.

While the writer was teaching in seminar class applying socratic seminar, she found that some students who have good mark in theory, do not get good mark in practice. Most of the students were not able to have good presentation, especially in questioning. The technique of Socratic seminars dates back to Socrates, who used questioning to improve his students' reasoning skills thereby leading them to become more rational. Socratic questioning is based on the premise that all thinking has a structure and the questioning exposes the logic of the participants' thoughts (Paul & Binker, 1990). Today, Socratic instruction can take many forms, but these forms all share one commonality that someone's thought is developed as a result of probing, stimulating questions asked (Paul & Binker, 1990:270).

Socratic Seminar is to stimulate critical thinking and to illuminate ideas. It is a form of inquiry and discussion between individuals or group, based on asking and answering questions. In applying Socratic seminar, questions are really needed to stimulate critical thinking of participants. Through this type of active process one has the ability to explore questions, evaluate possibilities, and synthesize original ideas, thereby developing critical thinking skills. This condition, then made the writer felt that it needs to conduct this research in order to find out how far the students could apply the Socratic questioning in the seminar class in which the students are making the presentation. Based on the background above, the problems of this research are formulated as follows:

1. What are the types of Socratic questions used by the students of sixth semester in English Department of FKIP UHN Medan?
2. What is the most dominant Socratic question type used by the students of sixth semester in English Department of FKIP UHN Medan ?

## **II. THEORETICAL REVIEW**

### **2.1. Definition of Socratic Seminars**

A Socratic Seminar is a scholarly discussion of an essential question in which student opinions are shared, proven, refuted, and refined through dialogue with other students. A Socratic Seminar fosters active learning as participants explore and evaluate the ideas, issues, and values in a particular text. The skills that students develop through participation in Socratic Seminars are crucial for college success. Successful Socratic Seminars are dependent upon groups of students developing skills together over time.

According to Brewer (2000:55) Socratic seminar is a method to try to understand information by creating a dialogue in class in regards to a specific text. Participants seek deeper understanding of complex ideas in the text through careful listening and rigorously thoughtful dialogue. After examining a text, students pose several kinds of questions, primarily open-ended, world connection, universal theme, and literary analysis questions. Such questions allow students to think critically, analyze multiple meanings in texts, and express ideas with clarity and confidence. In Socratic seminars, students conduct a dialogue. Participants in a Socratic seminar respond to one another with respect by carefully listening instead of interrupting. Students are encouraged to paraphrase and summarize essential elements of another's ideas before responding, either in support or disagreement. They feel comfortable to theorize, explore, refute,

and propose. They respectfully exchange ideas to stimulate thoughtful interchanges of ideas instead of looking to win or find the “right answer.”

In Socratic seminar, dialogue is the goal. Dialogue is characterized by suspending judgment, examining our ideas without defensiveness, exposing our reasoning and looking for limits to it, communicating our underlying assumptions, exploring viewpoints more broadly and deeply, being open to disconfirming data, approaching someone who sees a problem differently not as an adversary, but as a colleague in common pursuit of deeper understanding.

## **2.2 Socratic Questioning**

The Socratic approach to questioning is based on the practice of disciplined, thoughtful dialogue. Socrates, the early Greek philosopher/teacher, believed that disciplined practice of thoughtful questioning enabled the student to examine ideas logically and to determine the validity of those ideas. In this technique, the teacher professes ignorance of the topic in order to engage in dialogue with the students. With this “acting dumb,” the student develops the fullest possible knowledge about the topic.

The Socratic Questioning technique is an effective way to explore ideas in depth. It can be used at all levels and is a helpful tool for all teachers. It can be used at different points within a unit or project. By using Socratic Questioning, teachers promote independent thinking in their students and give them ownership of what they are learning. Higher-level thinking skills are present while students think, discuss, debate, evaluate, and analyze content through their own thinking and the thinking of those around them.

Paul (2006: 4) stated that Socratic questioning is disciplined questioning that can be used to pursue thought in many directions for many purposes, including: to explore complex ideas, to get the truth of things, to open up issues and problems, to analyze concepts, to distinguish what we know from what we don't know, to follow out logical implications of thought or to control the discussion.

Socratic questions take advantages of critical thinking overview to frame questions essential to the quality of it. It also has aimed to establish a disciplined “executive” level of thinking, a powerful inner voice of reason, to monitor, assess and reconstitute in a more rational direction our thinking, feeling and action.

Socratic question is not only formulation of the words to make a question, but it also include “why” those questions are asked in order to create critical thinking of students. Thus, if the main aim of the teacher is to encourage thinking, guide discovery, challenge assumptions or uncover new learning, then it is called Socratic. When the teacher is asking Socratic questions, teacher needs to adopt the role of an inquiring person who does not know the answer.

## **2.3 Types of Socratic Questions**

There were six types of Socratic questions based on Richard Paul's taxonomy; they are Questions of clarification, Questions That Probe Assumptions, Questions probing reasons and evidence, Questions viewpoint and perspectives, Questions probing implications and consequences, and Questions about question. But recently, Paul's six types of Socratic Questions were expanded to nine types. These questions are reproduced with permission from the Foundation for Critical Thinking. The taxonomy of Socratic question include Questions of clarification, Questions That Probe Purpose, Questions That Probe Assumptions, Questions That Probe Information, Reasons, Evidence, and Causes, Questions about Viewpoints or

Perspectives, Questions That Probe Implications and Consequences, Question about question, Questions That Probe Concepts, and Questions That Probe Inferences and Interpretations.

### **2.3.1 Questions Of Clarification**

The purpose of this question is to find missing or unclear information in the problem statement question. Question of clarification is delivered when the speaker use vague or unclear language, or when the listener just need more detail and seek to further understand. Clarification involves offering back to the speaker the essential meaning, as understood by the listener, of what they have just said. It is for the participants, and should not go beyond the boundaries of the presenter's dilemma. Here are some examples, What do you mean by?, What is your main point ?, What do you think is the main issue here?, Is it your basic point or ?, Could you give me an example?, Could you explain that further?

### **2.3.2 Questions That Probe Purpose**

The questions that probe purpose are intended to ask about things where the purpose of why they said is not clear. Ask them to justify their statement or dig for underlying causes. For examples, What is the purpose of? How do the purposes of these two people vary?, What is the purpose of addressing this question at this time?.

### **2.3.3 Questions That Probe Assumptions**

The type of this question is used to investigate about assumptions .The purpose of the question is to find out if there are any misleading or false assumptions. Here are some examples: What could we assume instead? How would you justify taking this for granted?, Is it always the case? Why do you think the assumption holds here?

### **2.3.4 Questions That Probe Information, Reasons, Evidence, and Causes**

The questions are used to investigate, dig, and find out about information, reasons, evidence, and causes of problems or issues being discussed. The purpose of this question is to explore whether facts and observations support an assertion. For examples: What would be an example? How do you know?, What are your reasons for saying that?, Do you have any evidence to support your assertion?, Are those reasons adequate?

### **2.3.5 Questions about Viewpoints or Perspectives**

The purpose of this question is to learn how things are viewed or judged and to consider things not only in a relative perspective, but also as a whole. Here are some examples :You seem to be approaching this issue from perspective. Why have you chosen this perspective rather than that perspective? How would other groups or types of people respond? Why? What would influence them?, etc.

### **2.3.6 Questions That Probe Implications and Consequences**

The purpose of this question is to understand the inferences or deductions and the end result if the inferred action is carried out. Here are some examples: What are you implying by that?, What effect would that have?, Would that necessarily happen or only probably happen?, What is an alternative?.

### **2.3.7 Questions about the Question**

The purpose of this question is to find out why the question was asked, who asked it, and why the question or problem needs to be solved. In other word, this type of question asks detail about the question. For examples: How can we find out?, Is this the same issue as .....?, How could someone settle this question?, Do we understand it?.

### **2.3.8 Questions That Probe Concepts**

This type of question is intended to dig detail about the main concept, problems or ideas being discussed. Here are some examples: What is the main idea we are dealing with?, Why/how is this idea important?, Do these two ideas conflict? If so, how?.

### **2.3.9 Questions That Probe Inferences and Interpretations**

Questions that probe inferences and interpretations are used to dig detail and deeper understanding about inferences, conclusion, opinion, decision and the interpretation about the problem based on the speakers. Here are some examples: Which conclusions are we coming to about?, Is there a more logical inference we might make in this situation?, Is there another possible interpretation?, What do you think of?.

## **2.4 Critical Thinking**

Dewey (1910) and Bono (1976), declared the aim of education is to teach young people to think. Critical thinking is a way to take charge of our thinking. Paul (2006) construes critical thinking as the ability to reach sound conclusions based on observation and information. Beyer (1983) describes critical thinking as assessing the authenticity, accuracy, and worth of knowledge, claims, beliefs, or arguments. Norris (1985) maintains that it helps students apply what they already know to evaluate their own thinking. However, our working definition should include the core meaning of the original concepts and what most people mean by the term. The ideas of critical thinking as a complex concept would be investigated by considering a variety of dimensions.

Smith (2000) helped his students reach a deep level of understanding and thinking through questioning the underlying beliefs and assumptions. Socratic method of instruction required the students to consider different perspectives. The importance of this method was its capability in stimulating the students' thinking. Socrates pointed out how educative good and deep questions can be, and how such questions can lead to deeper thought. His method of questioning is known as Socratic Questioning and is the best known critical thinking teaching strategy.

## **III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study is conducted using a qualitative research. Qualitative research is a generic term for investigating methodologies described as ethnographic, naturalistic, anthropological, field, or participant observer research. It emphasizes the importance of looking at variables in the natural setting in which they are found (Jacob, 1988).

The subject of this research is the students who take Seminar Subjectin semester VI. The data of this research are the students' oral presentation in seminar class taken using handycam sony. The writer records the activity of seminar in four meetings. To get the authentic data, the

writer conducted observation by recording the seminar activity. In conducting the research, the writer participated as the leader of socratic seminar. The students apply socratic seminar when they are presenting their proposal. After collecting the data, the conversation are transcribed, the occurrence of socratic questions are identified, and the types of socratic questions are classified,

## **IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

The dialogues of the proposal seminar in class for four meetings are transcribed and analyzed focusing on socratic questioning used by the students (participants). As explained above, in analyzing the data, the writer uses the theory of Richard Paul who stated that there are nine types of Socratic questions, namely; Questions of clarification, questions That Probe Purpose, Questions That Probe Assumptions, Questions That Probe Information, Reasons, Evidence, and Causes, Questions about Viewpoints or Perspectives, Questions That Probe Implications and Consequences, Questions about the question, Questions That Probe Concepts, and Questions That Probe Inferences and Interpretations.

### **4.1 Data Analysis**

#### **4.1.1 Questions of Clarification**

Some of the questions of clarification existing in four meeting are transcribed as following :

1. How can you apply your teaching learning in your classroom ?
2. Could you explain what you have analyzed ?
3. Can your students do it well ?
4. Does it just to prepare themselves?
5. Can you explain it ?
6. Would you like to explain to us the definition of your key terms of the title as you said before ?
7. Did they like to find the problem of the story?
8. Do you practice it in your classroom ?

The questions above are delivered by the participants as they try to find detail information or further explanation. The participants of Socratic seminar uttered the questions of clarification because there are some missing information about the issue being discussed. Further more, the participants also asked the presenter to clarify something by question of clarification because the presenter's explanation is not clear enough.

#### **4.1.2 Questions That Probe Purpose**

The aim of the question is to probe about the purpose of the concepts being discussed. The participants tried to dig information about the purpose by delivering this type of question. This question is intended to ask about things where the purpose of why they said is not clear. From the four transcripts of students' Socratic seminar, the writer found only one question that probe purpose, namely :What's your purpose to show us the comparison of this?

#### **4.1.3 Questions That Probe Assumptions**

During the application of Socratic seminar, the writer found that the students seldom use question that probe assumptions. In data 1 and data 2, the writer did not find this type of

question. The students delivered this question in data 3 and data 4. There is only one question that probe assumptions in data 3 and two question in data 4, i. e : What do you think about your title sentence ?

The question is delivered at the begining of the seminar. The participants asked the question to probe the presenters' assumptions about their title. The assumptions about title is very important before going to the further discussion. The assumptions about the title would be the basic of problems in a Socratic seminar. It will be the roots for another problems that would be discussed. Clear assumptions affected to the clearer understanding.

For example:

1. Isn't it too difficult? Why don't you go to the specific skill?
2. Ok.. if they have understood, they must know the vocabulary, how is it?

The questions asked about the presenter's assumptions. The participant tried to state her opinion first, but her target is to probe the presenter's assumption. The question examined whether there are any misleading or false assumptions. The same assumptions about the concepts among the presenters and all particants are very important because it could affect the continuity of Socratic seminar. In question number two, the participant tried to repeat the explanation from the presenter. But the participant asked the question to probe assumption. By the question, the participant tried to state her assumption first, but the end target is to examine the presenters' assumption.

#### **4.1.4 Questions That Probe Information, Reasons, Evidence, and Causes.**

Question that probe information, reasons, evidence and causes were often used by the students in the application of Socratic seminar. Most of them just used this type of socratic questions. Some of the questions from the four meetings are displayed.

1. How do you apply it in your teaching ?
2. What have you given to your students as their assignment ?
3. What assessment dp you use to measure the students' ability ?
4. What are the examples of negative comments ?
5. But, why do you just write only writing skill ?
6. Why don't you write what you just explained to us just now?
7. For what grade is this ?
8. What do you say to your students to tell a story in a good way?
9. Why do you choose this topic ?

The participants tried to ask detail information that she hasn't got from the presenters' explanation. The question probes the information about the concepts used, the questions probe information in the form of examples. The examples are really needed to prove some opinions or view. The questions are used by *what* questions. They are pure questions asking information needed to get clear undersatnding. The participants delivered the questions not because of she wanted to emphasize, but really wanted to get some important informations about problems being discussed. *Why* and *How* questions are also used in this type. The purpose of the questions are to investigate, dig, and find out about the causes. In the questions, the speakers wanted to dig about the concepts and the causes.

#### **4.1.5 Questions That Probe Implications and Consequences**

The purpose of this question is to understand the inferences or deduction and the end result if the inferred action is carried out. The participants asked the question to find out about the result of the application which has been applied by the presenters. For examples :

1. Is it successful?
2. How is the result ?
3. When you teach about this, do you get the target ?
4. How about the result that you found?

#### **4.1.6 Questions about the question.**

This type of question is seldom used by the students in the application of Socratic seminar by sixth semester of English Students FKIP UHN Medan. The question is asked by the presenter, such as:

1. I don't get what you ask. Can you say that again, please?,
2. What's your question?
3. Anymore questions?

The question in this section is to ask the clarification about the question. The speaker did not understand well about the question delivered before. That is why this question is delivered to get more understanding about the question point. Then, the presenter invites the participants to give questions.

#### **4.1.7 Questions That Probe Concepts**

This type of question was often used in the application of Socratic seminar by sixth semester of English students FKIP UHN Medan. Most of the students were interested to ask about the concepts, problems, or ideas being discussed. Question that probe concepts can enlarge and improve the ideas among the participants in a Socratic seminar. The followings are the examples of questions that probe concepts given by the participants.

1. How do you guide the students understand the questions?
2. Do you give the students questions ? or do the students ask about the pictures ?
3. What skills did you give to your students ?
4. What is the method you use to apply your theory?
5. So how do you ask them?
6. What kind of error analysis do you have in your research ?
7. What method did you use to improve students' vocabulary?

#### **4.1.8 Questions that probe inferences and interpretation**

This type of question was not often used by the students. There is only a few question that probe inferences and interpretation, such as: What do you think about this? The question is used to dig detail and deeper understanding about inferences, conclusion, opinion, decision, and the interpretation about the problem based on the speaker. The participant asked the question in order to get understanding based on the presenters' interpretation. It is very important so that the basic view about the concepts discussed could be same. It could avoid misleading.



## 4.2 Findings

After analysing the data from the four meetings, the result of the data analysis is tabulated as follow.

### Questions Used by the English Department Students of Sixth Semester

No	Types of Question	Meetings				Total	%
		1	2	3	4		
1	Questions of clarification	3	6	2	2	13	20
2	Questions That Probe Purposes	-	-	1	-	1	2
3	Questions That Probe Assumption	-	-	1	2	3	5
4	Questions That Probe Information, Reasons, Evidence, and Causes	11	3	4	4	22	38
5	Questions about Viewpoints or Perspectives	-	-	-	-	-	-
6	Questions That Probe Implications and Consequences	3	2	-	-	5	8
7	Questions about questions	-	2	-	-	2	3
8	Questions That Probe Concepts	7	3	4	3	17	26
9	Questions That Probe Inferences and Interpretations	-	-	-	1	3	2

Based on the table above, it can be seen that the Socratic questions used by the sixth semester of English students FKIP UHN are Questions of clarification, Questions That Probe Purposes, Questions That Probe Assumption, Questions That Probe Information, Reasons, Evidence, and Causes, Questions That Probe Implications and Consequences, Questions about questions, Questions That Probe Concepts, and Questions That Probe Inferences and Interpretations. Questions about View points or Perspectives are never used by the students during the application of Socratic seminar.

The most dominant Socratic question used is Questions that Probe Information, Reasons, Evidence, and Causes. It is the most dominant Socratic question among seven Socratic questions used by the sixth semester of English students FKIP UHN Medan.

## V. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the students' ability in making questions in seminar presentation is still on the level of getting information from the text. The students or participants do not have capability to view or to judge things from some other perspectives. They do not prepare themselves reading the seminar paper before the presentation starts. They commonly used Questions that probe information, reasons, evidence, and causes during the application of Socratic seminar. The writer assumes that the students lack of reading. So, they

do not have large knowledge to analyze, improve, and conclude problems based on some other viewpoints or perspectives.

Therefore, to make the students able to make questions about viewpoints or perspectives, the students are suggested to read more. Reading may influence critical thinking. It helps students to deliver all kinds of socratic questionings. The seminar paper should be shared to the participants before Socratic seminar is started. Text is one of the elements of Socratic seminar. The participants should know and understand about the problems or issues discussed before Socratic seminar is held in order to be able explore complex ideas, to get the truth of things, to open up issues and problems, to analyze concepts, and to distinguish what we know from what we don't know.

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