

## **Critical Thinking In Higher Education**

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### **Abstract**

#### **Introduction**

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*Critical Thinking-CT plays a crucial role in all facets of life. Business education is no exception. There are evidences that educators in business outlined the importance of teaching CT skills in higher education Wang, X. et al, 2016; Heijltjes, A. et al, 2015; The objective of this article is to contribute in incorporating teaching CT in higher education.*

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- I- Definition of Critical Thinking
- II- Importance of Critical Thinking in Higher Education
- III- Disposition of Critical Thinking

#### ***I- Definition of Critical Thinking***

There are numerous definitions of Critical Thinking-CT in current literature. As Flores K. L. et al, 2012 indicated “the concept of critical thinking is too complex to be limited to a narrowly defined construct”.

There are two categories of CT. One is the kind of CT approached in higher education has a strong focus on formal knowledge within the boundaries of a disciplinary, to abstract logical argument in a search of greater truth. This is known as “logicism” which implies that good thinking is logical thinking. (Walters, 1994). In logicism approach, Critical Thinking is utilization of cognitive skills to increase the probability of a desirable outcome.(Halpern, 1999).

Logical CT is a goal-directed, reasoned thinking that strives to solve problems, formulating inferences and making decisions when the thinker is applying skills that are effective for a particular context. (Halpern, 1996). The other category of CT has a broader, more comprehensive approach which goes beyond the constraints of “logicism” to incorporate a holistic approach such as imagination (Gallo, 1994).

Others defined CT as “reasonable and reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do” (Ennis 1987). Scriven & Paul (1992) view CT as the intellectual disciplined and rigorous process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, synthesizing, and evaluating ideas and information by a process of observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication and utilizing these information as a guideline to one’s belief and behavior.

Critical thinking can also be defined as, “Purposeful, Self-regulatory judgement which results in interpretation , analysis, evaluation, and inferences, as well as explanation of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteriological or contextual considerations upon which the judgment is based.” (Facione, 1990).

The authors define Critical Thinking as questioning the accepted assumptions, theories, and statements with an independent- mindedness and courage in an objective manner to synthesize new discoveries.

## ***II- Importance of Critical Thinking in Higher Education***

The importance of critical thinking in higher education has been well established. Heijltjes, A. et al 2015; Behar-Horenstein, L. S. et al 2015; Huber, C. R. et al 2016 .

Critical thinking can be traced back 2,500 years ago to Socrates (Sampson, D. C. et al.2007). The importance of CT skills in education is emphasized by educational philosophers (Siegel,1980). Halpern,1988, stated that the promotion of CT is one of the priorities of higher education.

The drastic and unprecedented change in technology and workplace created a need for critical thinking more than ever before (Halpern, 1999); Therefore, “the development of critical thinking is often put forward as an ideal of higher education” (Walker&Finney,1999 ). The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development in 1989 concluded there is no reason that young adolescents cannot engage in critical and higher order thinking. The US Congress through the Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1990, established five national educational goals; One of these goals called for increase in a number of college graduates who can think critically and be effective in problem solving (Ratcliff, 19993). Individual scholars also express the need for training in critical thinking skill in higher Education (Rickman, 1981). Others discussed the importance of preparing college students who are able to synthesize and think effectively. Nevertheless, the institutions of higher education continue to graduate students who cannot think “in straight line; and who cannot evaluate the interior logic of an irrational argument.”(Lincoln 1999). Factors such as technology, workforce, and global competition requires Critical Thinking to be incorporated in the education system. The movement is not limited to the U.S., other countries such as Canada also placed an emphasis on education models that produce students who are able to think critically (Wright,1996).

## ***III. Dispositions of Critical Thinking***

It seems that CT has a set of characteristics and dispositions. Review of current literature ; reveal the following as some of these characteristics: (keeley et al.,1995; Browne&freeman,2000 and Garside, C. 1996).

- 1- Motivation to think critically. Developing critical thinking is not solely dependent on the professor’s aptitude. Motivation of the learner to think critically plays a major role. The joy of discovery and learning is the reward that reinforces further motivation.
- 2- Desire for discovery. Willingness to consider novel approaches to a specific issue is another factor in CT
- 3- Curious mindset. Curious mindset is also a prerequisite for CT, and ensures pursuit of discovery.
- 4- Knowledge of subject. In depth knowledge of the subject provides the professor to evaluate and assess the issue from variety of directions needed for critical thinking
- 5- Valuing Change. Status quo is counterproductive to discovery and CT.
- 6- Tolerance for ambiguity. Tolerance for ambiguity which leads to discomfort and insecurity helps the learner better absorb the wisdom of experts in the field.
- 7- Flexible mental commitment. Rigidity of mindset prevent learner from mental flexibility required in CT.
- 8- Controlled Skepticism. Controlled skepticism focused on obtaining sufficient reasoning to accept an idea is another key components of CT. Garside,C. 1996.
- 9- Willingness to suspend judgments. Quickness in developing an idea prevents the learner from evaluating alternatives leading to tunnel vision which is counter productive to CT.
- 10- Inquisitiveness. Inquisitiveness which is referred to evaluation or investigation of accepted assumption is the beginning of the path to CT

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