

Critical Thinking as a Core Competency in Higher Education

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Abstract

This paper offers an extended exploration of critical thinking as a fundamental competency in higher education. It investigates the role of critical thinking in supporting academic performance, autonomous learning, problem-solving, and informed decision-making, as well as its relevance for preparing students to function effectively in complex professional and social contexts. The study reviews theoretical perspectives, instructional approaches for developing critical thinking, and the challenges associated with its implementation. The results highlight that cultivating critical thinking is essential for intellectual development, adaptability, and lifelong learning in a rapidly evolving knowledge-based society.

Keywords: critical thinking, higher education, cognitive abilities, problem-solving, analysis, evaluation, independent learning, decision-making

Annotatsiya

Mazkur maqolada tanqidiy fikrlashning oliy ta'limdagi asosiy kompetensiya sifatidagi ahamiyati keng yoritiladi. Unda nazariy yondashuvlar, tanqidiy fikrlashning akademik muvaffaqiyat, mustaqil o'rganish, qaror qabul qilish va muammolarni hal qilishdagi roli ko'rib chiqiladi. Shuningdek, ushbu ko'nikmalarni rivojlantirish usullari va ularni ta'lim jarayoniga joriy etishdagi muammolar tahlil qilinadi. Natijalar tanqidiy fikrlashning intellektual rivojlanish, moslashuvchanlik va uzluksiz ta'lim uchun muhimligini ko'rsatadi.

Kalit so'zlar: tanqidiy fikrlash, oliy ta'lim, kognitiv qobiliyatlar, muammo yechish, tahlil, baholash, mustaqil o'rganish, qaror qabul qilish

Аннотация

В данной работе представлен расширенный анализ критического мышления как ключевой компетенции в высшем образовании. Рассматриваются его теоретические основы, значение для академической успеваемости, самостоятельного обучения, принятия решений и решения проблем. Особое внимание уделяется методам формирования критического мышления, а также трудностям его внедрения в образовательный процесс. Делается вывод о том, что развитие критического мышления является важным фактором интеллектуального роста, гибкости мышления и непрерывного образования.

Ключевые слова: критическое мышление, высшее образование, когнитивные способности, решение проблем, анализ, оценка, самостоятельное обучение, принятие решений

In modern higher education, the emphasis has shifted from merely delivering knowledge to cultivating essential cognitive and transferable skills. Among these, critical thinking is widely regarded as a key competency that enables students to function effectively in an increasingly complex and information-driven world.

The rapid development of digital technologies has significantly increased access to information. As a result, students must not only acquire knowledge but also assess its reliability, interpret it critically, and apply it appropriately. Within this context, critical thinking plays a vital role in ensuring both academic success and responsible participation in society.

This study aims to examine critical thinking as a central component of higher education by analyzing its theoretical background, practical applications, and the challenges involved in fostering it.

Critical thinking is a complex and multidimensional concept that has been explored across various academic disciplines, including education, psychology, and



philosophy. It is commonly described as a deliberate and self-regulated cognitive process involving analysis, evaluation, and reasoning. From a cognitive standpoint, critical thinking aligns with higher-order thinking skills outlined in Bloom's Taxonomy, particularly analysis, evaluation, and creation. These skills extend beyond basic knowledge acquisition and require deeper intellectual engagement. From a philosophical perspective, critical thinking emphasizes logical reasoning, skepticism, and open-mindedness. It encourages individuals to question assumptions, consider alternative viewpoints, and base their conclusions on evidence rather than subjective opinion.

Critical thinking plays a significant role in enhancing students' academic performance. Learners who possess strong analytical abilities are more capable of understanding complex concepts, engaging critically with academic literature, and constructing well-supported arguments. In academic writing, critical thinking enables students to organize their ideas coherently, use evidence effectively, and critically assess sources. This contributes to the production of higher-quality academic work. Additionally, critical thinking facilitates active participation in classroom discussions, debates, and collaborative learning environments. It promotes deeper engagement with subject matter and fosters a more meaningful learning experience. One of the primary goals of higher education is to develop independent learners who can take responsibility for their own educational progress. Critical thinking is central to achieving this objective.

Students equipped with critical thinking skills are able to identify their learning needs, locate relevant information, and evaluate its usefulness. This enables them to become more self-directed and effective in their studies. Furthermore, critical thinking is closely linked to metacognitive awareness, allowing students to reflect on their thinking processes and improve their learning strategies. The cultivation of critical thinking requires purposeful and structured teaching strategies. Active learning



methods, such as problem-based learning, case analysis, group discussions, and debates, are particularly effective in promoting these skills. Another important approach involves the use of open-ended questions that require students to analyze, evaluate, and justify their responses. Such tasks encourage deeper cognitive engagement.

Integrating critical thinking into assessment practices is also essential. Assessments should not only measure factual knowledge but also evaluate students' ability to apply concepts and construct logical arguments. Moreover, providing detailed and constructive feedback supports students in refining their thinking processes and improving their performance. Despite its recognized importance, the development of critical thinking in higher education faces several obstacles. Traditional teaching methods that prioritize memorization over analysis remain prevalent in many educational systems.

Another challenge is the varying levels of students' preparedness. Some learners may lack the foundational skills necessary to engage in higher-order thinking, which can hinder their progress. Large class sizes and limited instructional time may also restrict opportunities for interactive and student-centered learning. Additionally, educators may require further training to effectively incorporate critical thinking into their teaching practices.

In today's digital environment, critical thinking has become increasingly essential. Students are exposed to vast amounts of information through online platforms, not all of which is accurate or reliable. Critical thinking skills enable students to evaluate the credibility of sources, identify misinformation, and make informed judgments. These abilities are crucial for navigating digital spaces responsibly. However, easy access to information may reduce students' motivation to engage in deep analysis. Therefore, educators must encourage active inquiry and critical evaluation of information.

Critical thinking is a vital competency in higher education that contributes to academic success, independent learning, and professional readiness. It equips students with the ability to analyze information, evaluate evidence, and make informed decisions in a complex and rapidly changing world. To effectively foster critical thinking, higher education institutions must adopt student-centered pedagogical approaches, integrate these skills into curricula and assessments, and provide adequate support for both students and educators. Ultimately, critical thinking is not only an academic requirement but also a lifelong skill that empowers individuals to adapt, innovate, and contribute meaningfully to society.

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