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**PROGRAM: DOCTORATE IN GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING**

**COURSE TITLE: CRITICAL THINKING**

**CTI 058**

**ASSIGNMENT: Barriers to Critical Thinking in Education**

**NOVEMBER, 2021**

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# Introduction

Education provides an avenue for individuals to learn and develop the needed skills for personal development to enable them fit for the society, professions and the job market. Although covertly, soft skills are one of the skills that are embedded in curricula used for teaching and training in school all over the world. Some institutions however, may be deliberate on the teaching of soft skills. In most instances, individuals are expected to learn soft skills as they go through the educational system. Critical thinking is one of the essential soft skills that individuals and students are expected to develop at the end of their education period. The concept originated in America in the 1980s and first used in Russia in the late 1990s as “Reading and writing for Critical Thinking”. Critical thinking is built on the theories of Jean Piaget, on the stages mental development of a child, and LG Vygotsky on the general development of the child, E. Popper and R. Paul on the formation and development of critical thinking, E. Brown and N. Beck on metacognitive education (Umrzokova & Pardaeva, 2020). This is an important skill because it enable students to develop solutions and answers to both common and complex problems. Students are expected to show innovativeness and uniqueness in their responses to questions in class and during discussions or interactions both in and out of the classroom. Aside in academia, critical thinking is also important in other aspect of a students’ life.

Critical thinking has been identified as a wide range of cognitive skills and intellectual tendencies to analyze arguments and overcome prejudices, respectively (Hashimah, Nor & Kamaruzaman, 2011). Astleitner (2007) defines it as a high order thinking skill at assessing arguments, which involves interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference. Paul. Richard and Elder (2006) argue that critical thinking is the rigorous discipline of verifying the best thinking a person can have under any conditions or context. Ennis (1989) proposes a number of cognitive skills and dispositions of critical thinkers, for example, holding a view, defending it or changing it according to evidence and arguments; understanding the causes of a problem and suggesting alternatives to solve it, being open-minded, considering the context, posing relevant questions, being empathetic, among others. These are skills that are essential to students for within the academic setting and outside of school. As students progress into the world, they may come across others who do not have the ability to be critical in their thinking. It is important that students recognise this and ensure that reasoned judgement and enough evidence inform their views. Critical thinking is therefore a needed skill for every individual.

It is however unfortunate that the activities of most schools does not encourage critical thinking. For example, schools place much value on standardized testing and uniform teaching over critical thinking exercises. This in and of itself is a major barrier to helping individuals develop and utilize their analytical thinking skills. In some instances, the barrier to critical thinking may not be as a result of practices or activities that the schools undertake but rather as a result of the students own personal attributes. It is important that teachers understand the barriers and challenges that hinder students critical thinking abilities and also identify how to address these challenges. Critical thinking may be taught to students however, the most important aspect is the outcome of the teaching process that is the ability of students to put what has been studied into practice.

# Barriers to critical thinking

## *Individual/Personal Barriers to critical thinking*

Critical thinking is a skill that is important as part of the development of every student. Though the skill is taught in the classroom in some schools, it is the responsibility of the individual to harness this skill for their own good. Some students may make the effort to develop their critical thinking abilities however, there are personal characteristics or attributes of individual students that contribute to serving as a barrier to critical thinking. Students’ may or may not be aware of having such characteristics. In some situations, these characteristics may be inherent. It is therefore important that teachers identify such characteristics and put in place systems that discourage such characteristics so that any barrier to critical thinking is removed.

Self-centredness, also known as, egocentrism is one of the behaviours of individuals that hinders their critical thinking capabilities. Studies have shown that as egocentrism in an individual increases, the ability to reason decreases (Rycek *et al.*, 1998) and an egocentric individual lacks the ability to differentiate his or her thoughts (Wadsworth, 1996). Not all students are egocentric and hence this may not apply as a general barrier however personal attributes play a significant role in ensuring that the critical thinking capabilities of an individual is developed. Egocentric thinking is a natural tendency to view everything in relation to oneself. This type of thinking leads to the inability to sympathize with others or analyse and evaluate various perspectives. Sadly, since most egocentric people are not willing or cannot see this character flaw within themselves, this increases the difficulty in overcoming the barrier. As young students contemplate who they are and where they fit in, egocentric thinking may become more apparent. Egocentric nature or behaviour is a natural tendency and is many a time difficult to overcome. One of the most major hurdles to critical thinking is a student's ego. It's more of a character flaw, and changing it, despite repeated attempts, is quite difficult. Such kids lack the ability to assess the perspectives and sentiments of others, making it difficult for others to collaborate with them. They require experiences, discussion chances, brainstorming sessions, and the opportunity to ask relevant questions in order to recognize and appreciate the perspectives of others. Creating a teaching environment that stimulates critical thinking can assist students in overcoming egocentrism. Teachers can assist students in thinking more critically, especially during social confrontations.

Groupthink can lead to irrational decision-making. It's hard to overcome, just as egocentric thinking. Breaking the loop necessitates individuals standing away from the group and questioning common beliefs, ideas, and attitudes. This can be particularly tough for adolescents, but teachers can help kids develop independent thought and action. Group thinking is another one of the dangerous hurdles to critical thinking, as well as being unhealthy. In such a case, the person lacks the ability to form his own viewpoint or make decisions in any given situation. To overcome this, members of the group must take a step back and question and formulate their own ideas. Expanding teaching strategies that encourage learners to think creatively can facilitate student learning in the classroom while avoiding a groupthink teaching style. This enables students to make connections and question logic, both of which are critical thinking skills. Our students receive direct decision-making instruction to help them address complicated challenges. It's simply not enough to expect them to make decisions based on trial and error. Critical thinking skills can be developed by learning how to debate and offer constructive arguments. Learners are more inclined to think, question, and analyze as they grow familiar with and repeat this thinking talent. As a result, this reduces the likelihood of them developing a groupthink perspective.

Drone mentality has been identified as one of the characteristics or behaviours exhibited by some students that hinders their ability to be creative in their thinking. Such students are most often unconcerned about what is going on around them. They may not participate fully in activities that take place in the classroom and subsequently lack the skill to respond to new situations that they are not very familiar with. Such students would naturally avoid problems and tough hurdles for the sake of convenience and ease. Routine teaching has been identified as one of the common practices that could encourage the drone mentality among students. Teachers should resist the urge to fall into routines that could lead to a drone mentality in the classroom. Their teaching approaches can stay fresh and exciting while creating a critical thinking atmosphere by constantly making connections to new topics and fields.

Social conditioning is a condition that arises as a result of stereotyping and making assumptions. Social conditions blinds students from the realisation that they are making assumptions and engaging in stereotyping because their minds are conditioned to think in certain directions. Teachers can assist their students in evaluating their own thinking by assisting them in making a list of their thoughts and beliefs. It's also crucial to instil in them the values of clarity, precision, and fairness in their thinking. Many of us have a propensity of thinking only within our comfort zones, and we rarely venture outside of them because we have been taught to think in a certain style and manner as a result of numerous societal circumstances. Social conditioning creates barriers to critical thinking by stereotyping things and people around us and making undesired assumptions that make it harder for everyone in the organization to function.It requires cultural and social awareness to overcome this behaviour and barrier.

Personal biases can stifle critical thinking by preventing the thinker from being objective, inquisitive, or open-minded. This way of thinking can also inhibit someone from making educated decisions based on their own experience, reasoning, and common sense. Teachers should encourage students to use logic to develop critical thinking skills. This forces them to assess the clarity and precision of their reasoning. Teachers can effectively assist students through the critical thinking process by giving them assignments that use questioning tactics and critical thinking replies. One of the most significant Barriers to Critical Thinking is having a personal bias, which limits and prevents a person from making decisions that are fair, open-minded, and honest. It also stops the person from making informed and valid decisions using logical thinking, experience, and basic common sense.

Arrogance and bigotry are not accepted in the thoughts of true critical thinkers. This is because it causes a person to have a closed mind-set and the belief that he already knows everything and that there is no need to learn new things. With a closed mind, finding the optimal answer to an issue is practically difficult. Individuals who lack critical thinking skills frequently react to problems in a careless and dangerous manner. What individuals should do instead is evaluate and accept responsibility for their choices, as well as the benefits or consequences that come with them. Arrogance and intolerance stifle creativity and offer little possibility for alternative problem-solving solutions. A teacher must have students evaluate their rationale if they assume there is no better answer to an issue. Arrogance is a poor attitude that can make it difficult to think critically. Arrogance causes a person to fail over time because he has blocked up his learning channels and is unable to evaluate the rewards and advantages of critical thinking. A student with a stubborn character would have his own set of views and ideologies. Such a barrier does not help in education as well as in the outside world, which is ever evolving and dynamic in its character and attitude. The student must be open to change and let go of old notions, realizing that the corporate world is fluid and fast-paced, requiring flexibility and adaptability.

Fear and laziness frequently serves as a barrier to not only critical thinking, but also to a person's general growth and development. Fear makes him insecure, demotivated, and slow to look outside the box and devise new ideas and plans. Fear can arise for a variety of reasons, including anxiety, depression, self-esteem concerns, and other personal issues that impact a students' academic and social life. A lazy student would not be able to think critically because critical thinking requires that students would engage in extensive research and study and would be interested in learning new things. A lazy student may not see the need for these and hence the amount of knowledge available to such a student may be only that which has been received from the classroom. This may not be enough basis for thinking innovatively or outside the box.

Besides, they relatively prefer activities and assignments with simple answers and are not tolerant with the difficulty of thinking. To tackle the problem, program developers and educators need to consider ways of dealing with student resistance to active learning.

## *Institutional Barriers to Critical thinking*

Personal attributes of the student as discussed may play a critical role in determining the critical thinking abilities of the student. Whereas good attributes would position a student better to be able to think critically, negative attitudes would hinder a students’ thinking capabilities. Aside personal attributes, the educational system may also contribute to limiting students’ creative minds. Some activities in the curricular may not overtly support the development of critical thinking abilities in students. In order to develop critical thinking in students, barriers that are as a result of educational structures and systems must be identified and removed.

Education in itself is a barrier to critical thinking and the development of critical thinking. Traditionally, the goal of education has been to preserve culture through the transmission of knowledge accumulated in the development of education and its embedded subjects or topics. As such, teachers are forced to spoonfeed students with knowledge that have been embedded in textbooks and curricula developed for teaching. This practice does not encourage the development of new ideas and challenges to the status quo. Education has to move from a state where students are spoon fed to a stage where students develop and add to already existing knowledge.

Integrating learning opportunities that encourage critical thinking abilities is sometimes hampered by time restrictions. Teachers frequently cover a lot of content in a short amount of time as a result of test scores and compulsory instructional measures. This means that assignments and tests are frequently given to assess students’ understanding of what has been taught in the classroom. As a result, students are often limited to studying materials and information that only relate to what they would be graded on. This situation offers little room for critical thinking. In some instances, students who go out of their way to study new information to expand their knowledge on any topic may not excel in class because they may provide answers, which the teachers have not taught. Some teachers limit students to providing answers that have been given during lessons as such any other different answer is unwelcome. Teachers can acquire several tactics that empower them to naturally model thinking behaviours in the classroom that develop learners' critical thinking skills with training, practice, and patience. It is especially important that teachers do their best to create a learning schedule that is not hindered by time constraints. Critical thinking lessons should always be a top priority.

A number of factors, such as teaching curriculum, determine teaching approaches in schools. Kember (1997) in his review suggested that the curriculum of schools is usually more focused on teaching the subject matter rather than the development of critical thinking. Some schools however, inculcate the teaching of critical thinking in their curricula as a way of harnessing the skill in students. Though the method is a good one, some teachers may not have the abilities to teach critical thinking. In a study conducted by Aliakbari & Sadeghdaghighi, (2013), Over half of the teachers agreed or strongly agreed that they lacked confidence in their ability to teach critical thinking skills. Almost as many didn't know how to model or exhibit critical thinking. They also underlined the need for greater professional development and education in the field of teaching.

Furthermore, feeling unprepared to teach critical thinking abilities was cited by 65 percent of teachers as a crucial component in critical thinking growth. It is critical that schools provide opportunities for instructors to learn how to teach the skill because a teacher can only have an impact if they have a deep understanding of a subject. Teachers in educational environments have an important role in increasing critical thinking among students, and teaching critical thinking abilities to pupils necessitates competent teachers who can use higher order thinking skills. As a result, the findings suggest that teachers' comprehension of the notion of critical thinking needs to be improved in order for them to effectively educate students to think critically.

Teachers like students are also humans and may possess certain attributes that hinders critical thinking in education. Individuals are generally hostile to accepting new methods of doing things and teachers are no exception. Aliakbari & Sadeghdaghighi’s study showed that although nearly 95% of teachers agreed that teaching strategies can change students' critical thinking, majority of teachers (54%) were not willing to implement new teaching strategies. Unwillingness to implementing new strategies can be related to the fact that more than 75% of teachers found it difficult to change their teaching strategies and that they had difficulty implementing new, innovative teaching strategies.

Students’ critical thinking abilities may also be limited by the fixation on having good grades. Students are particular about their grades because it is a metric for accessing how excellent they are. As such, they may shun all activities that do not contribute directly to improving their grades. In a school that rewards grades rather than innovativeness, students would be willing to maintain a status quo in their line of thinking and fail to think outside the box. Such an environment does not support the development of critical thinking.

Critical thinking development and education may not be a priority in some schools and institutions. As such, administrative support towards the subject may be lacking. In such a situation, teachers may have no choice that to disregard the need to train students with critical thinking abilities. Schools may admit large number of students per class, and assign large number of students in total teaching load, however would not provide appropriate instructional material. These can serve as impeding factors to critical thinking.

# Conclusion

There are a variety of approaches to overcoming critical thinking obstacles. One method is to have students pick a topic and prepare a paper illustrating a range of techniques to solving an issue on that topic. When teaching critical thinking abilities, teachers might use real-life scenarios like automobile shopping as examples. You can have students talk about the stages involved in buying a car and how to make the best selection possible based on a range of considerations like income, down payment alternatives, and auto insurance rates. Another technique to teach critical thinking skills is to demonstrate how a poor decision might result in a negative result. The idea is to show that making mistakes and enduring the repercussions of those mistakes is an unavoidable element of decision-making. More importantly, problem solving is a valuable skill that will affect nearly every element of a student's future.

Teachers play an important role in influencing students' behaviour and critical thinking skills. These abilities can improve a student's academic performance in the classroom and throughout his or her life. Critical thinking is difficult to master, and even more difficult to transfer across fields. It takes explicit and purposeful instruction to teach pupils to think critically.

Students must be aware of the barriers, understand the challenges they may bring, and overcome them as best they can in order to be critical and reflective thinkers. This begins with a clear grasp of what is expected. Some students are apprehensive about challenging experts' work. Critical thinking does not imply criticizing another’s work or telling them that they are incorrect; rather, it promotes a better knowledge, the examination of various viewpoints, and participation in thought, conversation, or study that informs independent judgment. In order to engage effectively with critical and analytical thinking, students would also need to study widely about a subject and ask questions.

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