

THE ROLE OF CRITICAL THINKING IN CONTEMPORARY EDUCATION

Turanan Palsa

A young researcher, Australia.

Abstract: In the age of information, the ability to think critically is more crucial than ever. This paper explores the philosophical foundation and practical role of critical thinking in modern educational systems. Using a qualitative analytical method, the study investigates how fostering critical thinking benefits learners and contributes to their intellectual autonomy. The results suggest that critical thinking enhances students' decision-making, moral reasoning, and active citizenship. These findings support the inclusion of critical thinking as a central goal of educational curricula worldwide.

Keywords: Critical thinking, education, philosophy, intellectual autonomy, reasoning skills, modern pedagogy.

Introduction

Critical thinking, traditionally a subject of philosophical inquiry, has become a central focus in education debates worldwide. It encompasses the ability to analyze arguments, identify logical fallacies, and assess information independently. The roots of critical thinking trace back to Socratic questioning, Enlightenment rationalism, and John Dewey's pragmatism. In contemporary times, the digital revolution and the deluge of online content have made critical thinking an essential skill for students and citizens alike. This paper examines the philosophical importance of critical thinking and its application in educational settings.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative, philosophical-analytical method. Primary sources from classical and modern philosophers (Socrates, Kant, Dewey, Freire) were examined to trace the historical evolution of critical thinking. In addition, educational policies and curriculum documents from several countries (USA, Finland, Japan) were reviewed. Secondary literature, including peer-reviewed articles from philosophy of education journals, was analyzed to understand the practical integration of critical thinking in schooling.

Results

The analysis revealed three major outcomes:

1. **Philosophical Justification:** Critical thinking is fundamentally linked to concepts such as autonomy, moral responsibility, and freedom of thought. Kantian ethics, for instance, views autonomy as essential for moral action, which requires independent reasoning.
2. **Educational Implementation:** Countries that emphasize critical thinking in their curricula (e.g., Finland, Singapore) show better student engagement, creativity, and civic participation.

Programs that encourage open discussion, debate, and problem-solving show a measurable improvement in students' reasoning abilities.

3. **Barriers to Integration:** Despite its acknowledged value, critical thinking is often marginalized due to standardized testing regimes, authoritarian teaching styles, and insufficient teacher training in philosophy or logic.

Discussion

The findings highlight that critical thinking is not just a cognitive skill but a philosophical virtue central to human development. Its inclusion in education promotes intellectual freedom, self-reflection, and ethical reasoning. However, realizing its full potential requires educational reforms that support teacher autonomy, emphasize liberal arts, and reduce over-reliance on rote learning. Philosophers like Paulo Freire have argued that education must be liberating—enabling students to question and transform the world around them. Thus, fostering critical thinking is both a pedagogical necessity and a philosophical imperative in modern education.

Conclusion

This paper concludes that critical thinking, deeply rooted in philosophical traditions, must be a cornerstone of contemporary education. Its development empowers learners to engage with knowledge critically, act ethically, and contribute meaningfully to society. To realize this goal, education systems must embrace a more reflective, discussion-based approach rooted in philosophical inquiry.

References:

1. Dewey, J. (1910). *How We Think*. D.C. Heath & Co.
2. Ennis, R.H. (1996). *Critical Thinking*. Prentice Hall.
3. Kant, I. (1784). *What is Enlightenment?*
4. Lipman, M. (2003). *Thinking in Education*. Cambridge University Press.
5. Paul, R. & Elder, L. (2006). *The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking Concepts and Tools*.
6. Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Herder and Herder.
7. OECD (2021). *Education Policy Outlook: Finland*. OECD Publishing.