

## Transformative Learning and Critical Thinking in Online Education

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**Abstract:** Existing in the 21st century has driven all students to be one step ahead of the trend, using available and latest technologies to enhance their learning. In higher education, independent and long-distance learning should have been designed and deployed. Participating in a virtual learning environment is insufficient without the capacity to critically think. Critical thinking is a skill that is absolutely necessary for students in higher education. The problems and techniques for incorporating critical thinking in learners via online learning are discussed in this article.

**Key words:** critical thinking, transformative learning, online education.

### Introduction

Most people equate it with official education in schools, colleges, and universities when it comes to learning. These are the formal learning environments where students should get an excellent education. They believe that education may help people enhance their performance and capacity to find better and more fulfilling employment, also making more money in their chosen field. On the other hand, Lifelong learning encompasses all aspects of life, learning from womb to tomb. Education is just one of several different learning methods since there are several other ways to expand an individual's knowledge and gain practical skills during one's life. Therefore, lifelong learners are driven to learn and improve because they want to. It denotes a conscious and intentional effort on the part of persons. People grow and learn willingly because it may increase their awareness of the world over them and give them more and higher possibilities to enhance their standard of living. Finally, it contributes to one's career advancement. The concept of lifelong learning is partially overtrumped and densely connected with such terms as permanent education, recurrent education, continuing education, learning organization, and learning society.

Critical thinking is more than simply a way of thinking; it is also a talent becoming more vital in the workplace. Critical thinking was scored higher than innovation and information and technology expertise by Chartrand, Ishikawa, and Flanigan as an essential talent necessary for future relevant work experience. Analyzing all of the critical thinking definitions listed above and its vital advantages in the workplace, it is clear that critical thinking is linked to cognitive ability and the process of higher-level thinking. Therefore, before entering the workforce, students must first have experience in critical thinking in the classroom.

Transformative learning theory by Mezirow was based on the concepts and methodologies of other philosophers, like Kuhn and Habermas. Disorienting dilemmas, frames of reference, meaning perspectives and schemes, perspective transformation, habits of mind, and critical self-reflection were among the contributions and notions drawn from prior philosophers that Mezirow employed as reference words. In general, the transformational learning theory refers to a method of learning based on a fundamental shift in adults' reference frames of set beliefs and expectations. The mind's concepts and knowledge, and practices in action are fundamentally transformed as a result of this shift in reference frames. As a result, this shift necessitates more excellent critical reflection and thought to build new frames of meaning. Only critical thought and reflection on the

environment, content, method, or propositions may modify meaning structures in this transformation process. Critical thinking should be geared at shifting frames of reference so that ideas, attitudes, ethical beliefs and values, cultural meanings and understandings, as well as abstract and aesthetic ideals, might shift.

Online learning is becoming more significant in today's educational environment, owing to the fast rise of new technologies, as well as pandemic situations. Critical thinking skills may be developed via online learning activities. Online learning also includes teachers interacting with students in online procedures, activating consciousness in interpreting the instructions, making judgments about various information, and finding answers and solutions. Critical thinking is seen as a crucial trait in the virtual learning environment, to be held by competent students and for long-term learning; as a result, students will be able to synthesize and evaluate sources of information and incorporate with web-based learning. This type of activity covers the implementation of critical and reflective behavior. Any online learning course would stimulate critical thinking to impart knowledge and facilitate coordinated dialogues.

Furthermore, it is claimed that the cognitive component of the mental process is more amenable to being adapted to distance learning. Furthermore, since distant learning relies on online materials, instructors must be careful when selecting resources. The degree of critical thinking growth happened in various online venues due to its practical application, including internet conversations, discussion forums, and email. Because they emphasize the aspects of disputes and sharing of ideas, online forums have been proven to be helpful for teachers to coach and foster greater and much more analytical learning. Numerous studies have demonstrated that internet participation positively impacts students' academic achievement. Online-based learning may help to improve ideas and actions connected to critical thinking ideals.

Despite all of the advantages, incorporating critical thinking into available internet learning is a problem for educational practitioners, particularly instructors. A range of difficulties surrounding the application of critical thinking via online learning, including socio-cultural, theoretical, practical, methodological, and technological concerns, are provided. First and foremost, critical thinking is linked to the socio-cultural aspect.

Asian students, such as Japanese, Chinese ones, were unable to express the critical thinking notion in their writing course on English since Western-oriented critical thinking differs from the Oriental academic system and culture. Stapleton did this research in 2001. Furthermore, critical thinking is not just a cultural issue, but it is also rarely offered to learners on a social level. Critical thinking is a complicated concept, even in social practice. Although critical thinking is a new style of thinking, it should not lead students to be enthralled by the prospect of unexpectedly being shown the world in a new light thanks to special interests or empirical instruments for examining it.

There are many techniques to help educators fix the barriers of promoting critical thinking via online learning. The chosen technique in the teaching and learning procedure and other scientific and conceptual methods used by professors in virtual classes are all feasible options. Four major pedagogical factors lie underlying the e-learning structure: content, instructional techniques, practical patterns, and feedback. In terms of content, instructors are supposed to include critical thinking principles into assigned recommended reading and tasks to improve students' critical thinking skills. After students have read the materials, the assignment might alter their critical behavior and help them remember the topics. Furthermore, developing online activities is likely to engage any virtual learning environment. However, the effectiveness of implementing internet sources to promote students' critical thinking in the university environment was at least somewhat dependent on the participants' growth processes, previous experience with educational technology, and extent of interaction.

It is significant that teachers as instructors perform an essential role in designing online learning activities. Some research suggests that teachers take on the role of online facilitator: describing

course topics, holding conversations on track, exposing competing viewpoints to students, assisting students in navigating the online platform, and supporting suitable online comportment are all part of this procedure. Teachers' being there is vital in making the conversation seem "critical." In order to promote critical thinking, teachers must have the capability, character, and inspiration to differentiate among the dialog that is required to be caused by divergence and more clarification to learners' thoughts; as a result, students will attempt to express and verbalize their judgments. In response to that declaration, instructors are required to distribute specific training and material via double communication between students even if teachers are not present in the learning gathering. The instructor's engagement in guiding the debate is critical in encouraging students' higher-order thinking methods. Theoretically, a teacher-led conversation in an online forum or on a digital learning platform is an excellent way to encourage learners to think critically. Hence, it has been concurred that well-made discussion questions are necessary for promoting high-level critical thinking abilities. Also, teachers are to give efficient time and model for students to analyze their thinking, synthesize their understanding from previous readings, and confidently comment in different group discussions.

Moreover, online collaborations between students and an instructor and students with other students should be successful. As part of an online community, all students should participate in a group activity, and offering group projects has been proved beneficial. Furthermore, group activities are a great way to practice and improve critical thinking abilities. Peer feedback activity increases students' critical thinking since each peer will formulate and antedate their replies. In a nutshell, this declaration is logical since the group and peer activities will allow students to be easy-going, respect others' perspectives, and exchange, discuss, and question one another's views. As part of active learning, the teacher can create a relevant project. As part of the learning process in the online environment, the students may be able to actively build new talents and perceive new experiences via the project guided through online learning.

### **Conclusion**

To summarize, combining critical thinking with an online environment provides the whole package to represent current education. In all of its importance and optimism, critical thinking is becoming a sought-after talent in the globalized world. Teachers emphasize critical thinking principles, ideas, and conduct as the goal of today's higher education environment. Furthermore, technology, such as online learning, is a prominent component impacting several aspects of teaching and learning systems. Whether they like it, teachers must get acquainted with the technology. E-learning has proven to be a fantastic tool for encouraging learners to think critically. However, educators will face specific problems in terms of application and feasibility. These difficulties include sociocultural issues in establishing the critical notion that many Asian nations encounter, particularly in the educational environment of Uzbekistan, Japan, and other eastern countries. Furthermore, technical and practical challenges linked to instructors' familiarity with the new online environment make it difficult for teachers to create and choose appropriate themes and procedures. Finally, instructors examine numerous ways to overcome such problems, including introducing the correct topic and engaging activities connected to the substance of essential ideas and well-made online debates and group assignments.

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