

THE ROLE OF CRITICAL THINKING IN HIGHER EDUCATION*Student: Fariza Husniddinova**Kimyo International University in Tashkent**Scientific Adviser: Maftuna Nurova,**Teacher of English Language Department,**Kimyo International University in Tashkent***Annotation**

In both education and work, critical thinking is very important. It helps people make better decisions, solve problems, and stay motivated. This article explains how critical thinking supports student success in higher education. It also shows how motivation and thinking skills work together, especially when using modern tools like artificial intelligence (AI). The article shares different theories of motivation and explains how students can use critical thinking to study better, stay focused, and prepare for the future (Paul & Elder, 2014).

Keywords: critical thinking, higher education, motivation, cognitive skills, learning, AI, problem-solving, decision-making

Introduction

Today, the world is changing quickly, and students need more than just knowledge to succeed. They also need to think deeply, question ideas, and find good solutions to problems. This is called critical thinking (Paul & Elder, 2014). In higher education, critical thinking helps students to understand information better, solve problems, and make smart choices. It also supports motivation and helps students keep working hard even when learning is difficult. Students who develop this skill early in their education are more prepared to deal with challenges in both academic and real-world situations.

The Importance of Critical Thinking in Education

Critical thinking means looking at a situation carefully, asking questions, and using logic to find answers. In universities, students read many texts, do research, and write essays. If they think critically, they can understand the ideas better, find the main points, and give their own opinions (Paul & Elder, 2014).

Critical thinking also helps with group work. Students can listen to others, give feedback, and explain their own views clearly. This builds strong communication and teamwork skills, which are important in real jobs too. It teaches students how to agree and disagree respectfully, which is an essential part of professional and social life.

Moreover, critical thinking improves creativity. When students learn how to ask good questions and think outside the box, they are more likely to come up with original ideas.

These ideas can be used in presentations, research papers, or projects that have real-life impact.

Motivation and Critical Thinking

Motivation is the reason why people do something. There are two types of motivation:

- Intrinsic motivation (doing something because you enjoy it),
- Extrinsic motivation (doing something for rewards like grades or money) (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Critical thinking helps students understand what motivates them. For example, a student may study hard because they want to get a good job (extrinsic), or because they love the subject (intrinsic). A critical thinker knows both are useful and finds a good balance (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Also, when students use critical thinking, they can evaluate their progress better. They are more likely to reflect on what methods work best for them and make changes when something is not working. This reflection leads to personal growth and helps students become independent learners.

Theories of Motivation and Their Connection to Thinking

There are many theories that explain why people feel motivated:

1. Instinct Theory – People act based on natural feelings. For example, a student might feel curious to learn. But this is not enough alone. Critical thinking helps turn curiosity into real learning.
2. Drive-Reduction Theory – People want to reduce discomfort. For example, if a student feels stressed before exams, they will study. But critical thinking helps find better and healthier ways to prepare (Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 2014).
3. Incentive Theory – People are motivated by rewards like good grades. But too much focus on rewards can make students forget about real learning. Critical thinking helps them focus on what really matters (Pink, 2009).
4. Cognitive Approach – This theory says our thoughts affect our actions. Students who believe they can succeed are more likely to do well. Critical thinking helps them understand their own thoughts, set goals, and make plans (Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 2014).

The Role of Critical Thinking in AI-Based Learning

Nowadays, many students use AI tools like apps or websites to learn. These tools can help with grammar, vocabulary, or pronunciation. But students must know how to use them correctly. For example, AI cannot understand culture or emotions. Critical thinking helps students see the good and bad sides of technology, and use AI as a tool, not a replacement for learning (Lu, 2018).

Furthermore, AI may provide fast answers, but it cannot judge whether those answers are ethically or logically correct. A critically thinking student can recognize when the

information needs to be checked or confirmed. In this way, students learn not only how to use digital tools but also how to think independently and not depend only on machines.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Critical Thinking in Higher Education

Advantages:

- Helps students make smart and logical decisions.
- Improves problem-solving skills.
- Increases self-confidence and motivation.
- Builds deeper understanding of topics.
- Supports communication and teamwork.
- Helps students use modern technology wisely.
- Encourages creativity and innovative thinking.
- Prepares students for leadership roles by improving judgment.

Disadvantages:

- Takes more time and energy.
- Can cause overthinking and confusion.
- May not fit with traditional learning styles.
- Sometimes makes students feel tired or stressed.
- Can cause conflict with others who don't like being questioned.
- Requires a lot of practice and support to master fully.

Conclusion

Critical thinking is one of the most important skills in higher education. It helps students think clearly, stay motivated, and face difficult problems with confidence. When combined with motivation, critical thinking leads to better learning and personal growth. Universities should support students in developing these skills to prepare them for a successful future in work and life (Paul & Elder, 2014).

As technology becomes more common in education, students will face even more challenges. That is why critical thinking is necessary to use these tools effectively. It is not only about academic success but also about becoming a thoughtful and responsible person. In the future, students with strong thinking skills will have better chances to lead, to innovate, and to create a positive change in the world.

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