

FACULTY'S PERSPECTIVES ON UNDERGRADUATE
ISLAMIC EDUCATION STUDENTS' PRACTICE OF
CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

BY

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ABSTRACT

The implementation of critical thinking skills is important for students. Previous studies have found that the educational institutions in Malaysia are still unable to achieve the objectives of instructional pedagogy in the classroom especially in enhancing critical thinking skills. Therefore, this study examined how to develop critical thinking skills of undergraduate students from the perspective of faculty's members. This study was qualitative in nature because it sheds light on the experiences and perceptions of individuals from their own perspectives on a particular program. The data collection was carried out through interviews with faculty members, who teach the teaching of Islamic Education undergraduate students, Kulliyah of Education, IIUM. Based on the themes that emerged from the data, three conclusions were drawn. Firstly, the participants highlighted that the practice of critical thinking skills would leave a positive impact on the learning experience of students. Their responses suggest that critical thinking skill is the ability of the student to collect information and express his/her thought to solve problems. Likewise, through the acquisition of higher order thinking skills, problem solving skills, reflection skills and synthesise skills, students are able to practice critical thinking skills. Secondly, among the effective strategies in developing critical thinking skills of Islamic Education students, students' centred learning activity, visual learning, and assignment, workshops, building self-confidence and open-ended questions. Students are able to develop critical thinking skills through the implementation of these effective strategies. Although the practice of critical thinking skills has been implemented, there will also obstacles in developing critical thinking skills related to problem solving skills issues, higher ordered thinking issues, lack of confidence, language skills issues, close mindedness, time management skill issues, academic background of the students and students' family background. The study suggests carrying out further researches which can cover a greater population especially in the Kulliyah of Education, IIUM. It also recommends supporting the management educational institutions in conducting programs to develop the critical thinking skills of the students.

ملخص البحث

يعد تنفيذ مهارات التفكير النقدي أمرًا مهمًا للطلاب. ولقد وجدت الدراسات السابقة أن المؤسسات التعليمية في ماليزيا مازالت غير قادرة على تحقيق أهداف التربية التربوية في الفصل، خاصة فيما يتعلق بتعزيز مهارات التفكير النقدي لدى الطلاب. لذلك تناول هذه الدراسة كيفية تطوير مهارات التفكير النقدي لدى طلاب المرحلة الجامعية من وجهة نظر أعضاء هيئة التدريس. هذه الدراسة نوعية بطبيعتها لأنها تسلط الضوء على تجارب وتصورات الأفراد من وجهات نظرهم الخاصة في برنامج معين. تم جمع البيانات من خلال مقابلة بعض أعضاء هيئة التدريس الذين يقومون بتدريس تخصص التربية الإسلامية للطلاب البكالوريوس، كلية التربية، الجامعة العالمية الإسلامية بماليزيا. بناءً على الموضوعات الناشئة عن البيانات تم استخلاص ثلاثة استنتاجات من هذه الدراسة. أولاً، أبرز المشاركون أن ممارسة مهارات التفكير النقدي يمكن أن يكون لها تأثير إيجابي على تعلم الطلاب. بناءً على إجاباتهم، فإن مهارات التفكير النقدي هي قدرة الطالب على جمع المعلومات والتعبير عن أفكاره لحل المشكلات. وعليه فمن خلال اكتساب مهارات التفكير العليا، ومهارات حل المشكلات، ومهارات التأمل، ومهارات التوليف يكون الطلاب قادرين على ممارسة مهارات التفكير النقدي. ثانياً، من بين الاستراتيجيات الفعالة في تنمية مهارات التفكير النقدي لدى طلاب التربية الإسلامية نشاط التعلم المتمحور حول الطالب، والتعلم البصري، والتخصيص، وورشات العمل، وبناء الثقة بالنفس، والأسئلة المفتوحة. ويستطيع الطلاب تطوير مهارات التفكير النقدي من خلال تنفيذ هذه الاستراتيجيات الفعالة. على الرغم من ممارسة مهارات التفكير النقدي إلا أنه يتوقع أن تكون هناك عقبات في تطوير مهارات التفكير النقدي المتعلقة بقضايا مهارات حل المشكلات، وقضايا التفكير العليا، وانعدام الثقة، وقضايا المهارات اللغوية، وقضايا العقلية المتقاربة، وقضايا مهارات إدارة الوقت، والخلفية الأكاديمية للطلاب، والخلفية العائلية للطلاب. توصى الدراسة بإجراء دراسات أخرى تعطي مجتمعات بحثية أكبر خاصة في كلية التربية، IIUM. كما تقترح دعم الإدارات المسؤولة عن المؤسسات التربوية من أجل تنفيذ برامج فعالية لتطوير مهارات التفكير النقدي لدى الطلاب.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Education.

.....
Tahraoui Ramdane
Supervisor

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Education.

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This dissertation was submitted to the Kulliyah of Education and is accepted as a fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Education.

.....
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Dean, Kulliyah of Education

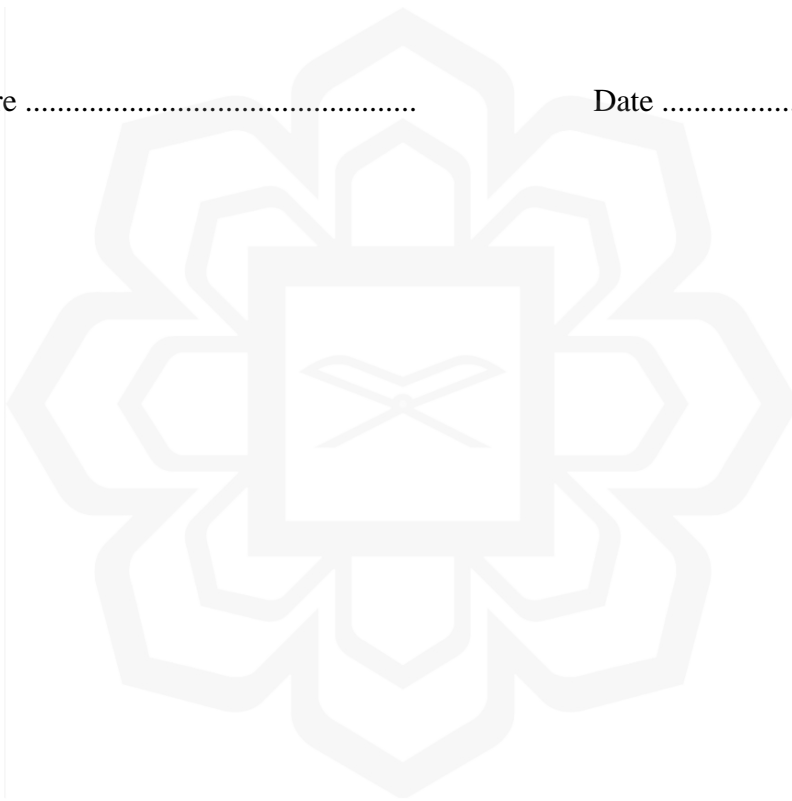
DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

Pandang Margatama

Signature

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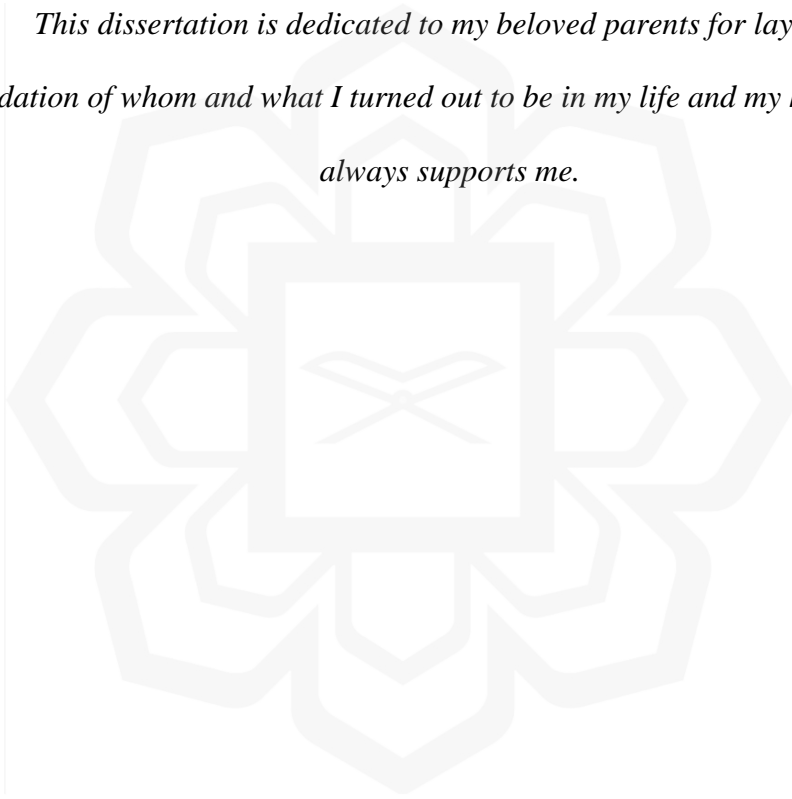
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This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved parents for laying the great foundation of whom and what I turned out to be in my life and my husband who always supports me.



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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

With the advancement of technology, education has witnessed a curriculum revolution that aims to fulfil the demand of society in developing human intellectual capital. Accordingly, education is required to formulate a curriculum capable of producing good and balanced persons for the future (Meyers, 1986). The formulation and revolution of the curriculum should embrace all aspects of education which includes knowledge, skills, attitude, values, creative thinking, and thinking skills. These aspects are not be separated but are related to each other, which are needed to develop a balanced person physically, spiritually, emotionally and intellectually. Moreover, a balanced person is known as one who is equipped with problem solving, arithmetic, reasoning, interaction, communication, and critical thinking skills (Nordin, & Surajudeen, 2015). These particular aspects require teachers to teach students in higher learning institutions using critical thinking skills styles because these students are and will be confronting many new and contradictory ideas and challenging environments (Meyers, 1986).

Furthermore, according to Biggs (1993), competition in technological advancement and the workplace require educators to prepare them for the needs of existing conditions. Effortful thinking is necessary when the goal is not immediately attainable, and its solution is not obvious. It only becomes effortless when we know what to do to attain the goals and objectives (Biggs, 1993).

Human beings are sometimes offered too much information to deal with in daily life. Therefore, we need to find ways to pick the information in order to not

overburden the cognitive process. Yet, at times we do not have all the information we need to make the right decisions and solve the problems we are facing. The cognitive process in thinking helps human beings deal with situations when there is too much or too little information at hand. The more knowledge they have, the more they can think about and consider the problem-solving process, and finally make a good decision (Onwuegbuzie, 2001).

The argument about the need for critical thinking skills has always been an important issue in the modern educational system. The younger generation today must be equipped with critical thinking skills. This involves building their capacity to think and developing their intellectual capital so that they have the flexibility to predict any challenges that may arise (Fisher, 2011). Furthermore, according to Jamal and Mustafa (2004), a person who can think critically, asking questions, gather relevant information, and sort the information, may achieve the highest level of higher order thinking skills.

From the perspective of Islam, critical thinking skill is considered very fundamental in developing the Muslim intellectual capacity and it is part of a person's motivation in the reasoning process to accept the Islamic teachings and reject the Jahiliyah (pre-Islamic society). The Qur'anic emphasis on critical thinking can be observed through its firm objection to Taqlid, which promotes uncritical adoption and unquestioning acceptance of a doctrine without any valid reasoning, for example in Al-Anbiya (21:24) and Al-Naml (27:64). When the Quranic infers the sole lordship of Allah Ta'ala over the universe and asks man to serve his Lord, this is derived from an analytical introduction method built on a set of factual empirical premises that could be critically observed in the verses that signify various evidence of God's creation and lordship over the universe (Endut, & Wan Abdullah, 2009).

Recent studies in the Western and European countries indicated that students in higher educational institutions score low levels on critical thinking skills (Guest, 2000). Numerous studies have been done to identify the decline of the level of students' critical thinking skills and particularly in the system where the schools focus on the mastery of subject materials. Moreover, developing the students' capability in critical thinking skills has become a major concern of educators and educational practitioners today. Therefore, they began studying the influencing factors that contribute to the acquisition and development of critical thinking skills (Abdullah, A. K. 2010).

On the other hand, previous studies also have found that students' critical thinking skills are influenced by the teaching pattern of teachers (Zhaffar, Hamzah, Razak, & Abdullah, 2016). Academic staff needs to exert critical thinking skills in the pedagogy to encourage the students to be more critical, curious, and have a good problem solving ability.

Therefore, critical thinking skills become a great concern among current academic staff, educators, and teachers, as well as psychologists. They play a significant role in developing the students' critical thinking skills in their respective institutions. Hence, the top management should formulate the strategies to produce students who are able to think, act and handle situations well. This will not be possible unless their critical thinking skills are established (Rosnani & Suhailah, 2003). Therefore, this study focuses on the faculty's perspective on the practice of Critical Thinking Skills among Undergraduate Islamic Education Students at Kulliyah of Education-IIUM.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Over the past few decades, critical thinking has gained tremendous acceptance and it plays a significant role in giving new ideas for changes worldwide. Critical thinking is the skill to examine the way one thinks and comes out with the evidence to support the ideas one presents, rather than just accepting others' reason without sufficient approval (Facione, 1990). Therefore, critical thinking skills give several benefits to the one who applies them, such as better self-control in learning and respect toward different arguments of others. As a consequence, those who have the ability to be critical and independent in thinking had become better problem solver in life.

Moreover, Abdullah, Abdul Karim (2010) reported that many educational institutions are unable to achieve the objectives of instructional pedagogy in the classroom, especially in enhancing critical thinking skills. Many studies have been conducted to identify the obstacles of fostering critical thinking skills in educational institutions and it proposes solutions (Abdullah, 2010; Rosnani & Suhailah, 2003; Shah Sikandar, 2005). It is highlighted that the main problem in higher education is that university students are not able to be more critical towards certain condition especially in mastering and understanding the contents of the subject. Furthermore, in the case of learning Islamic Education subjects, most of the Islamic Education students do not exhibit a remarkable level of thinking skills, analytical skills, open mindedness, and evaluative skills. Therefore, based on the review of Ibrahim (2007), critical thinking among Islamic Education students is not widespread. Most undergraduate students of Islamic Education do not score well on the tests that measure the ability to recognize assumptions, evaluate arguments, and appraise inferences.

In addition, according to Dunn and Chew (2006), undergraduate students are only studying to pass than to have an excellent result. Therefore, they are unable to be more creative, open minded, and appreciate others' point of view. The problem arises from the school system that does not focus on developing critical thinking skills among students but is instead exam orientated.

The same phenomenon is noticeable in the Malaysian educational system. Rosnani and Suhailah (2003) reported that students are unable to apply the awareness of content learned at school to real-world issues after 11 years of schooling. Statistics from the industry often demonstrate the poor quality of university graduates who sometimes could not even understand an equipment manual, let alone to find better ways for the equipment to work (Rosnani & Suhailah, 2003).

From the above arguments, it can be justified that critical thinking skills are essential in supporting the academic performance of the students. Faculty members play a significant role in developing students' critical thinking skills through the pedagogical process in the classroom. Therefore, the current study attempted to explore the faculty members' reflection and perspectives of the Undergraduate Islamic Education Students' practice of critical thinking skills (CTS) at Kulliyah of Education, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM).

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study are as follows

1. To investigate the faculty member's perception of the practice of critical thinking skills among Undergraduate Islamic Education Students.
2. To identify the effective strategies which can assist the undergraduate Islamic Education students in developing critical thinking skills from the perspective of faculty members.
3. To identify the obstacles which prevent undergraduate Islamic Education students from developing their critical thinking skills, from a faculty member's perspective.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. How do the faculty members perceive the practice of critical thinking skills among Undergraduate Islamic Education students?
2. How do the Faculty members develop critical thinking skills among Undergraduate Islamic Education students?
3. What are the obstacles that prevent Undergraduate Islamic Education students from developing their critical thinking skills?

1.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Scholars and practitioners have underlined that the main objective of higher educational institutions is to cultivate graduates who are able to think critically and creatively (Pascarella, 1989). In today's modern education, educators taught and equipped students with critical thinking skills to face challenges, make the right

decisions, build an integrated personality, compete in society, share different ideas, and solve national problems (Ramsden, 2003).



Figure 1.1 Six Components of Critical Thinking Skills (Facione, 1997)

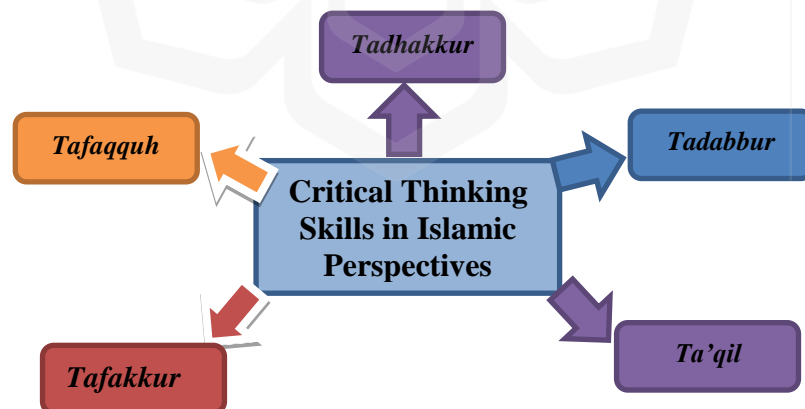


Figure 1.2 Critical Thinking Skills in Islamic Perspectives (Nordin & Surajudeen, 2015)

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

An individual's preferred way of learning and how the individual acquires information is the way of making student thinks critically and creatively. Although the teaching of critical thinking does not guarantee better living conditions for learners in the future, knowing critical thinking enables them to make a more accurate decision that would affect the future. Making an accurate decision about their lives could make them happier.

The finding of this research could answer the question of developing critical thinking skills among Islamic Education undergraduate students from the perspective of faculty members. These insights are important to the development of the critical thinking skills of Islamic undergraduate students. Furthermore, they provide deeper and clear descriptions and recommendations for the top management to intensify the practice of critical thinking skills in higher education, which is reflected as a solution to the challenges in society.

This research also contributes theoretically to the development of critical thinking skills in higher education and how to apply them in the instruction. It also enriches the literature in the field of critical thinking skills practised among undergraduate Islamic Education students in higher education.

1.7 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study focused on the practice/exercise of Critical Thinking Skills of Undergraduate Islamic Education students at Kulliyah of Education in IIUM as perceived by the faculty members. This study identified the obstacles as well on the practice of critical thinking skills in the classroom, by observing the effective strategies to develop critical thinking skills. The participants of the study comprised a

group of faculty members from Kulliyah of Education who teach undergraduate Islamic Education students only.

The university seeks to nurture in all its students' lifelong habits of cautious observation, creativity, moral, critical thinking, articulate expression, and reflection. University raises intellectual inquiry and critical thinking, producing graduates who will aid as active, engaged citizens, and ethical leaders. Tseng, Gardner, and Yeh (2016) stated that higher education aims to prepare the graduates with critical thinking skills which able to provide a solution to the problem of *Ummah* and equip the students with the knowledge they need to navigate in a complex global environment.

1.8 LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This study only involved three faculty members of the Teaching Islamic Education program at Kulliyah of Education, IIUM. Since this is a qualitative study, the findings should be carefully addressed. As in any qualitative study, there is the concern of validity based on the researcher's judgment and perceptions. However, measures were taken to minimize this, which will be described further in Chapter three.

1.9 DEFINITION OF TERMS

Critical Thinking skills are self-regulatory judgment that results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference, as well as explanation of the evident, conceptual, methodological, or contextual considerations upon which that judgment is based (Facione, 1997).

A critical thinking skill is distinguishing between verifiable facts and value claims. Distinguishing relevant from irrelevant information, claims and reasons,

determining factual accuracy of a statement, determining the credibility of a source, identifying ambiguous claims or argument, identifying unstated assumptions, detecting bias, identifying logical fallacies, recognizing logical inconsistencies in a line of reasoning and determining the strength of an argument or claim (Beyer, 1987).

Critical Thinking skills in Islamic Perspective is contemplation or deeply thinking of god's creation, the self and his laws are in itself one of the greatest forms of worship in Islam (Endut, & Wan Abdullah, 2009).

An Islamic Education student is an undergraduate student who focuses on studying Islamic studies (morals, manners, and ethics) in the formal education system (Ibrahim, 2007).

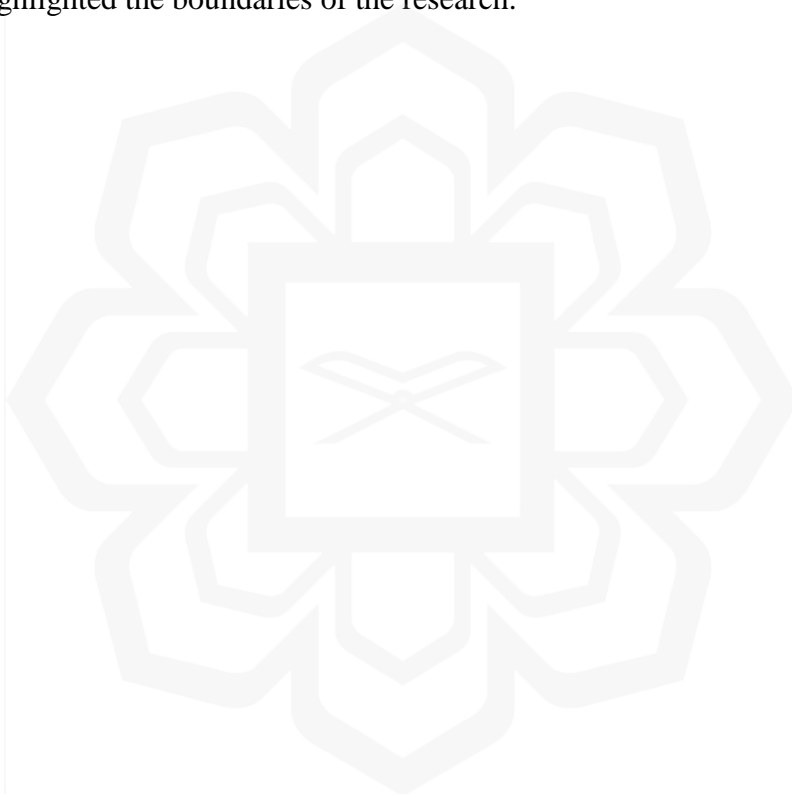
Faculty members are any person hired by the college or district to conduct classroom or teaching activities or who is otherwise considered by the college to be a member of faculty.

1.10 SUMMARY

Critical thinking is thinking that is purposeful, reasoned and goal-directed, the kind of thinking involved in solving problems, formulating inferences, calculating likelihood, and making decisions when the thinker is using skills that are thoughtful and effective for the particular context and type of thinking task (Halpern, 2012). As such, it is an important factor to students in higher education as the skills will help them in the learning process.

The background of the study was presented in this chapter. It explained the importance of applying critical thinking skills for students and teachers of higher education in creating better employees and citizens for this challenging era. In addition, the problem statement argued that the implementation of teaching critical

thinking has not reached the desired level set out in the curriculum goals. It also stated the reason students fail to think critically and creatively is that they only focus on the result of the exam. The research objectives and the research questions were also identified and described in this chapter. The significance of the study followed, highlighting how the study could be beneficial to faculty members, higher education students, educational theories and the government at large. The brief definitions of the key terms in this study were included and explained. Finally, the delimitation of the study highlighted the boundaries of the research.



CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 THE CONCEPT OF CRITICAL THINKING

2.1.1 Conceptualization and Definition

There are various definitions of critical thinking in the literature (Lipman, 2003). Ennis (1985) defined critical thinking as “reasonable and reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or to do.” In addition, Stenberg and Baron (1985) also defined critical thinking as “the mental processes, strategies and representations people use to solve problems, make decisions, and learn new concepts.”

To provide a workable definition of critical thinking, a group of scientists who joined the Delphi panel managed by Facione in 1990 and defined critical thinking as “self-regulatory judgment which results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference, as well as explanation of the evident, conceptual, methodological, criteriological, or contextual considerations upon which that judgment is based” (Facione, 1997). Moreover, Facione (2013) added that critical thinking comprised six skills, which are interpretation, analysis, inference, explanation, evaluation, and self-regulation.

Burden and Byrd (1994) described critical thinking as a thought process of a higher order that requires a range of cognitive skills. Although thinking objectively uses higher order thought, it is not equal to critical thinking and higher order thinking. For higher order thinking, critical thinking is not a “catch-all” class. It is one of closely related members of the higher order thinking family. The family includes problem solving, creative thinking, and making decisions (Facione, 1990).