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The Development of Critical Thinking Skills Regarding Philosophy Subject in The Algerian Educational System

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to investigate the representation of critical thinking and the pedagogical management of critical thinking skills in the Algerian context considering particularly philosophy teaching. Based on an analysis of curricula and educational policy documents, the research explores to what extent critical thinking is promoted across the different educational levels; i.e. from primary, middle, high school to university. The main claim is that, with the exception of a very weak and implicit engagement with critical thinking in Algerian high school level, in philosophy subject course, the Algerian syllabus does not provide a consistent and systematic promotion of these vital cognitive skills. The investigation situates critical thinking as a baseline for epistemic, intellectual and democratic university engagement and one of the particular ingredients essential at university, given that the students are, as usual, invited to 'engage' with "complex theoretical discourses". The article contends that the lack of a systematic critical thinking instruction impedes the students' ability to question knowledge claims, develop well-reasoned arguments, and take part in reflective judgment. In a philosophical perspective, the article investigates the founding principles of critical thinking, its importance in philosophy teaching and in the Algerian situation, and the consequences of neglecting it in teaching and academic life. Suggestions are provided for curriculum design, teacher training, and the promotion of critical thinking as a transversal skill in other subject areas.

Keywords: *Critical Thinking Skills, Philosophy, Algerian Educational System.*

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INTRODUCTION

Critical thinking (CT) has emerged as a foundational skill in contemporary worldwide education systems, recognized for its role in empowering learners to navigate complex information, foster intellectual autonomy, and participate meaningfully in democratic societies (Facione, 2011). In the context of global educational reform, critical thinking is often foregrounded as an essential outcome, with international discourse emphasizing its necessity for economic development, innovation, and civic engagement (Paul & Elder, 2019). Algeria, in its pursuit of modernizing its educational system since independence in 1962, has embarked on multiple curricular reforms. But, despite the move towards the implementation of competency based approach, project-based learning and learner centredness; that have been set clearly in the aims and objectives by the Algerian English syllabus designers to push students develop critical thinking skills; explicit instruction in critical thinking is notably scarce throughout primary and secondary education, with most curricular objectives focusing on basic literacy and rote memorization; that still adopting a traditional direct instruction and language content acquisition methods in teaching as well in designing tests (Baghoussi, 2021, p.108).

The absence of dedicated critical thinking subjects in Algerian curricula signals a research gap concerning the explicit fostering of those skills such as analysis, evaluation, and reflective judgment among students. While occasional references to critical thinking appear in policy documents and some competency-based approaches have been integrated, systematic mapping reveals that philosophy—primarily at the high school level—remains the sole formal curricular space where critical thinking is addressed in a sustained manner (Cherti, 2020).

This study posits that the Algerian educational system, particularly at the secondary stage, centers the development of critical thinking within philosophy subject, leaving other core courses and subjects marginally engaged or dependent on implicit strategies. The objectives are therefore to:

- Map the explicit and implicit presence of critical thinking across Algerian primary, middle, secondary, and higher education phases.
- Compare Algeria's pedagogical approaches to those found in international educational models.
- Advocate for pedagogical reform that foregrounds transversal critical thinking.
- Analyze current curricular and policy frameworks using document analysis and comparative policy review methodologies.

By expounding delineations of critical thinking development within Algeria and projecting reform endeavors, this research aims to contribute to national debates and align the Algerian approach with best practices in global education.

2. Theoretical Framework

Critical thinking occupies a central position in educational theory and practice, featuring both cognitive skills and dispositions. In educational psychology, critical thinking is described as a metacognitive process encompassing purposeful, self-regulatory reflective judgment, and involves the integration of cognitive abilities and dispositional traits (Facione, 2011).

2.1 Definition and Dimensions of Critical Thinking

The conceptual foundations of critical thinking are primarily derived from the disciplines of philosophy and psychology, with an additional perspective emerging from the field of education. Each disciplinary strand has cultivated distinct definitional frameworks for critical thinking, shaped by its unique theoretical approaches and methodological priorities (Lai, 2011). Critical thinking comprises two principal domains: cognitive skills and dispositions. Key cognitive abilities include interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation (Facione, 1990). These skills empower individuals to distinguish between facts and opinions, solve problems, and make reasoned decisions. Dispositions, meanwhile, reflect the motivation and tendency to apply those skills and can be seen as attitudes or habits of mind, they are encapsulating open and fair-mindedness, inquisitiveness, skepticism, prudence, flexibility, a propensity to seek reason, a desire to be well informed, a respect for and willingness to entertain diverse viewpoints, and reflective thinking (Facione et al., 1995; Lai, 2011). A thorough disposition towards critical thinking encourages a willingness to challenge assumptions, embrace diverse perspectives, and regularly evaluate one's beliefs and actions (Halpern, 1998).

Ennis (1962) have elaborated the three prime analytically divers dimensions of (CT) concept; a logical dimension, to comprise the judgmental process investigating the relationships among meanings of words and their composed statements, the competency in this dimension shows the personal knowledge of logical inferences of what entails from a statement of a set of premises, by virtue of their meanings. It's basically the necessary logical knowledge about the operators, connectives and rules that governs such relations and inferences.

As for the criterial dimension, which according to Ennis 1962 to be covering the knowledge of the criteria and standards for judging statements but not logical ones. It refers to the standards or criteria used to evaluate the quality of thinking, and emphasizes the use of those appropriate standards or criteria to judge the acceptability of statements or arguments. It involves: (1) Identifying relevant criteria for assessing statements, arguments, or beliefs. (2) Applying these criteria consistently to judge the strength, relevance, and credibility of information. (3) Using standards such as clarity, accuracy, relevance, depth, breadth, and logic to guide evaluation.

The pragmatic dimension as articulated by Ennis (1962), showing its role in evaluative judgment, emphasizing its influence on determining the adequacy of a statement relative to its intended background purpose. While it explicitly rejects the simplistic pragmatist notion that truth is solely defined by a statement's utility to the speaker, it affirms the relevance of contextual purpose in assessing the acceptability of claims. This dimension necessitates a nuanced balancing of factors prior to concluding that sufficient evidence exists, thereby acknowledging the inherent limitations of establishing exhaustive criteria for critical thinking. Consequently, it underscores the indispensable role of intelligent judgment beyond mere application of standards and semantic comprehension. Illustrative examples further clarify that background purpose informs the rigor of evidentiary standards and the required precision of statements, contingent upon the significance of accuracy and contextual demands.

2.2 Philosophical Roots of Critical Thinking

Philosophy is fundamental to the conceptual development of critical thinking, notably through the Socratic method, logic, and epistemology. The Socratic method, attributed to Socrates, uses structured questioning and dialogue to illuminate underlying assumptions and stimulate rigorous analysis, as represented in the Socratic dialectic method of teaching or discussion, that involving the asking of series of easily answered questions, inevitably lead the answerer to a logical conclusion foreseen by the questioner (Paul & Elder 2006). Logic entails the systematic evaluation of arguments and evidence, while epistemology investigates the nature, sources, and limits of knowledge. Through these reflects, critical thinking becomes a tool for epistemic engagement and intellectual autonomy, fostering democratic participation and civic responsibility (Facione, 2011). While the philosophy curriculum aims to encourage engagement with foundational questions about existence, ethics, and knowledge, excessive reliance on rote memorization often undermines such epistemic inquiry.

Thoroughly, the philosophical tradition workings have been emphasizing qualities and standards of good reason thought that meets adequacy and accuracy, by the implementation of formal rules of logic, as described by “purposeful, self-regulatory judgment which results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference, as well as explanation of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteriological, or conceptual considerations upon which that judgment is based” (Facione, 1990, as cited in Lai, 2011, p.3).

2.3. The Cognitive Psycho-Educational Models

The cognitive psychological approach is defining critical thinking includes a list of skills or procedures performed by critical thinkers, which have often criticized by philosophers, to be reducing a complex orchestration of knowledge and skills into a collection of disconnected steps or procedures (Lai, 2011). In this regard their definitions describe (CT) as the purposeful use of cognitive processes and strategies—such as problem-solving, decision-making, and

concept learning—that help individuals navigate challenges and increase the likelihood of achieving favourable outcomes. It involves both the internal mechanisms of thought and the deliberate application of mental skills to produce effective results.

Critical thinking development is supported by several robust frameworks in educational practice. Bloom's Taxonomy, formulated in 1956, classifies learning objectives from lower-order (knowledge, comprehension) to higher-order cognitive skills (analysis, synthesis, evaluation), providing an essential scaffold for curricular design (Bloom, 1956). Bloom's hierarchical taxonomy for information processing skills is one of the most widely cited sources for educational practitioners when it comes to teaching and assessing higher-order thinking skills (Lai, 2011). The Paul-Elder Framework, developed in the 1990s, offers a comprehensive model that incorporates elements of thought, intellectual standards, and intellectual traits. It emphasizes the need to evaluate reasoning through clarity, accuracy, relevance, depth, breadth, and logic, positioning reflective judgment as central to quality learning outcomes (Paul & Elder, 2001). Both models enable a structured approach to fostering and assessing critical thinking across disciplines.

Unlike the philosophical approach, this educational one is backed by years of classrooms experiences and observations of students learning process. But yet, still there many vague concepts to be fully useful in the direction of learning process and assessment (Lai, 2011). Even though, areas of agreement about the CT abilities include, analyzing arguments, claims, or evidence, making inferences using inductive or deductive reasoning, judging or evaluating, making decisions or solving problems (Ennis, 1985; Facione, 1990).

The conceptualization of critical thinking remains disputed, particularly regarding the role of dispositions. While there is broad consensus among scholars that critical thinking encompasses both cognitive skills and dispositional attributes, debate persists over whether dispositions should be interpreted solely in a laudatory sense or also in a normative framework. Although there had been acknowledgement on the importance of dispositions, the divergence was on their precise function: some viewed them as commendable traits, while others argued they are essential normative components of critical thinking (Lai, 2011). Which, as distinction, has implications for defining who the critical thinker. The prevailing view suggests that critical thinking entails not only the capacity but also the willingness to engage in reflective judgment, thus excluding individuals who possess the skills but lack the disposition. A minority perspective further contends that ethical considerations must be embedded in the definition, positing that critical thinking should not serve morally questionable ends (Lai, 2011).

3. Critical Thinking in Algerian Curricula

After Algeria's independence, the nation's educational system was repeatedly restructured, with curriculum reforms aimed at unifying the nation and modernizing learning

outcomes. Yet, despite these reforms, the development of critical thinking has not been a central objective in most curricular documents, especially at primary and middle school levels (Chergui, 2024). Still, many studies consistently demonstrate that Algerian secondary and higher education curricula fail to develop critical thinking skills (Baghoussi, 2021), with classroom observations and exam analysis displaying a focus on rote knowledge rather than analytical or evaluative abilities, that is already encouraged by the pedagogical setting, and the methods of teaching-learning process itself (Ibid).

3.1. Primary and Middle School Levels

Pedagogical strategies in primary and middle schools generally emphasize basic literacy, numeracy, and subject content mastery, largely shaped by traditional approaches and a centralized curriculum (Baghoussi, 2021). While recent competency-based reforms acknowledge the need for 21st-century skills—and occasionally reference analytical and communicative competences—the prevailing instructional practices heavily depend on rote memorization, textbook exercises, and exam preparation, with little space for student inquiry or problem-solving. The English and science curricula display some project-based activities intended to foster independent thinking, but these often remain at the level of formality rather than embedded pedagogical practice. Research shows that explicit goals or assessment methods for critical thinking are largely absent at these stages, and most teachers lack training in integrating inquiry-based methods (Chergui, 2024).

3.2. High School Level

Philosophy becomes a distinctive curricular subject in the second and third years of high school (“lycée”). Here, students encounter basic epistemological, ethical, and logic-oriented content designed to promote argumentation and reflective analysis. However, research indicates that teaching methods vary significantly: some instructors embrace dialogical or Socratic methods to encourage active engagement and debate, while others remain tied to a rigid, lecture-based delivery. This exam-oriented focus often undermines deeper critical engagement, reducing philosophy to the memorization of canonical themes and philosophers for exam success (Anani, 2025; Belarbi & Bensafa, 2020). Although the curriculum mandates the use of problematization and encourages addressing major philosophical questions, many learners report limited opportunities for true independent argumentation or conceptual critique.

Analysis of textbooks and classroom observation reveals an implicit, rather than explicit, treatment of critical thinking: students are expected to identify arguments and analyse philosophical problems, but the curriculum and assessment practices still prioritize recall and summary over original reasoning, even reforms have not improved critical thinking integration (Baghoussi, 2021; Belarbi & Bensafa, 2020, Anani, 2025).

3.3. University Level

At the tertiary level, expectations around critical thinking vary considerably by discipline. Humanities departments—philosophy, literature, and sociology—tend to explicitly encourage debate, analysis, and reflective writing. Other fields, in contrast, focus more on factual and procedural knowledge, usually neglecting direct instruction in argumentation or inquiry (Chergui, 2024). University educators express awareness of the importance of critical thinking and often use discussions, group work, and open-ended questioning to stimulate intellectual autonomy (Chergui, 2024). Nonetheless, significant challenges persist: entrenched lecture-based pedagogy, overemphasis on memorization, limited teacher autonomy, and absence of systematic training in critical thinking pedagogy. These factors prevent the widespread and effective cultivation of critical thinking, with students often struggling to engage independently with theoretical material and to articulate reasoned viewpoints (Chergui, 2024).

Dali Youcef (2023), also, in her study focusing on the teacher perceptions and barriers to (CT) integration, asserts that educators face considerable challenges in fostering (CT), despite having foundational knowledge of its principles. A prevailing obstacle is their limited understanding of effective strategies for cultivating CT skills, which hinders its integration into pedagogical practice. Additionally, resistance to adopting innovative, non-traditional teaching methods further obstructs CT implementation. This is compounded by the rooted dependence on lecture-based instruction within university settings, which emphasizes rote learning and lower-order cognitive processes, thereby constraining the development of higher-order thinking skills (Dali Youcef, 2023, Bougherara & Khaldi, 2021).

4. Comparative Analysis

Examining approaches to critical thinking in global educational systems highlights both universal priorities and regional distinctions. Algeria's curriculum and teacher training stand in marked contrast to models in the USA, Finland, and Morocco, and Tunisia revealing differences in content integration, pedagogical design, and assessment practices.

Table 1. International Models of Critical Thinking Integration.

Country	Critical Thinking Integration	Educational Phases
USA	Embedded in Common Core and state curriculum	All phases
Finland	Inquiry-based, multidisciplinary, media literacy	All phases
Morocco	Project-based learning, civic/philosophy reforms	High school & university
Tunisia	Science curriculum and youth initiatives	Most phases; emphasis on sciences
Australia	General Capability in all subjects	All phases

Source:author's name, year, page

In the United States, critical thinking is explicitly embedded through the Common Core State Standards, which prioritize analysis, argumentation, and reasoning at all education stages. Teacher training supports inquiry, debate, formative assessment, and project-based learning, promoting cross-disciplinary and transversal integration application of thinking skills (Edutopia, 2014).

Finland's education system is renowned for its child-centered, inquiry-focused curriculum, which fosters creativity, autonomy, and critical thinking from early grades. Finnish teachers receive rigorous research-led pedagogical training, and instructional flexibility enables continuous adaptation of teaching to student needs. Assessment emphasizes problem-solving and open-ended tasks rather than recall (Finnish National Curriculum on Media Literacy: A Global Model for Education).

Morocco has undertaken reforms aimed at embedding critical thinking in high school civic and philosophy courses, driven by the National Charter for Education and Training. Despite progress, adoption remains uneven due to resource constraints and traditional practices in the public sector. Project-based learning (PBL), a key reform, shows promise for fostering critical thought where implemented, but teacher training and assessment models lag behind private and international schools (Abdallaoui Maan, 2012).

Tunisia supports critical thinking through science curriculum reforms, explicit textbook objectives, and national youth development programs. Comparative studies indicate science textbooks often emphasize inductive reasoning, though more advanced credibility and assumptions skills remain underdeveloped. NGO and community programs, such as Ma3an, further address youth inclusion and resilience by fostering critical reflection (Bahat heg, 2019).

Critical and creative thinking is one of seven General Capabilities in the Australian Curriculum, developed purposefully within every subject and learning area. Students are expected to apply reason, logic, and reflective inquiry, practicing these skills through inquiry, evidence-based decision-making, discussion, and creative tasks at all phases (Australian Curriculum, General Capabilities: Critical and Creative Thinking (Version 9)).

4.1. Key Differences

- **Curriculum Design:** Algeria lacks transversal critical thinking integration, relegating explicit development mainly to philosophy in secondary education, while international best practices embed it cross-disciplinarily from early stages.
- **Teacher Training:** Finnish and U.S. systems invest heavily in teacher professional development focused on inquiry, while Algeria and Morocco struggle with limited pedagogical training for fostering critical thinking.
- **Assessment Models:** Algerian assessments emphasize memorization and standardized exams, whereas global leaders utilize formative approaches, including project-based and reflective assessments to capture complex thinking.

5. Challenges and Opportunities

Despite its recognized importance, critical thinking remains underdeveloped in Algerian classrooms due to institutional, pedagogical, and systemic barriers. Several interrelated factors restrict the cultivation of critical thinking and limit the effectiveness of reforms across the educational system.

5.1. Pedagogical and Institutional Barriers

- **Teacher Training Deficits:** Although educators in Algeria often receive theoretical instruction in critical thinking pedagogy through seminars and workshops, practical application in classrooms is rare. The lack of continuous professional development and hands-on support limits impact, leaving most teachers grounded in traditional, teacher-centered methods (Baghoussi, 2021), (Chergui, 2024), (Geryville, 2021).
- **Rote Learning and Exam Orientation:** The prevailing culture of rote memorization dominates both teaching and assessment. Lessons and examinations prioritize knowledge recall over reasoning, reflection, and problem-solving, greatly hindering the development of critical thinking abilities (Baghoussi, 2021).
- **Classroom and Curriculum Constraints:** Overcrowded classrooms, extensive curricular content, and lack of time undermine opportunities for active, student-centered learning and collaborative activities. Centralized curriculum control and rigid syllabus structures further restrict teacher autonomy and innovation.
- **Institutional Inertia:** Policy limitations and slow implementation of reforms impede sustained curricular innovation. While competency-based approaches have been introduced, actual classroom practices often lag behind official recommendations (Alioua, & Tahir, 2024).
- **Traditional Teaching Methods:** Philosophy lessons, while ideally suited for fostering complex reasoning and debate, frequently remain rigid and dogmatic, rarely involving interpretative, argumentative, or interdisciplinary content (Anani, 2025).

6. Opportunities for Reform

Despite substantial barriers, Algeria has significant avenues to advance critical thinking throughout its educational system by leveraging philosophical pedagogy, curriculum reform, and international collaboration. Various recommendations converge on the need for systemic transformation rooted in both local context and global pedagogical innovation.

6.1 Philosophy as Model for Interdisciplinary Critical Thinking

Philosophy, due to its analytic and reasoning-based nature, offers a foundation for cultivating critical thinking across disciplines. Expanding philosophy's methods—debate, argumentation, conceptual analysis, and reflective questioning—to areas such as sciences, social studies, and language education would foster transversal skills vital for democratic participation and civic engagement (Alioua, & Tahir, 2024), (Saadaoui, 2024), (Belwassa,

2024).

6.2. Digital Platforms and Collaborative Learning

Integrating digital platforms and collaborative technologies, such as forums for debate, peer review systems, and project-based inquiry, can compensate for classroom constraints and support reasoning, creativity, and reflective writing. These technologies also present opportunities for formative assessment and differentiated instruction, promoting autonomy and learner-centered practices (Zitouni, 2025), (Benmouhoub & Boukhedimi, 2019).

6.3. International Collaboration and Curriculum Innovation

Algeria's partnerships with European institutions, and engagement in international conferences, support the exchange of innovative practices and pedagogical models, driving reform and capacity building. Collaborative research, capacity-building programs, and mobility exchanges enable educators to develop broad, global perspectives on critical thinking instruction. Partnerships with external educational bodies and reform initiatives may help Algeria integrate best practices and contemporary pedagogical models that foster reasoning and argumentation skills (Zitouni, 2025).

6.4. Digital and Collaborative Platforms

Adoption of digital tools and platforms can facilitate debate, inquiry, and reflective writing, especially where physical or resource constraints exist.

6.5. Curricular and Assessment Reforms

- **Transversal Modules:** Introducing transversal modules in reasoning and logic, and argumentation across educational phases ensures that critical thinking is not confined to philosophy alone, promoting project-based learning, and diversifying assessment models to value critical engagement are instrumental in cultivating civic responsibility and democratic culture (Baghoussi, 2021), (Alioua, & Tahir, 2024).
- **Teacher Training:** Programs focused on inquiry-based and dialogic teaching can empower educators to foster argumentation and reflective judgment (Chergui, 2024), (Saadaoui, 2024).
- **Innovative Assessment:** Shifting from memory-based to reflective and process-based assessment models, including digital portfolios and peer evaluations, will better capture students' reasoning abilities (Benmouhoub & Boukhedimi, 2019).
- **Philosophy Beyond Secondary Education:** Elevating philosophy to a broader role beyond high school—incorporating its methods in university curricula—strengthens intellectual autonomy across fields (Belwassa, 2024)

6.6. Impact and Societal Implications

Reforms targeting critical thinking and philosophical pedagogy have far-reaching consequences for students' reasoning, argumentation, and civic engagement. By developing a "critical sense," Algerian education can contribute to a vibrant democratic culture and intellectual independence (Saadaoui, 2024).

7. CONCLUSION

Facione (2000) stressed that educators should turn their attention to develop positive attitudes towards critical thinking among students from an early age to yield building their personalities and their capacity for viewing issues critically. The development of critical thinking skills remains an unmet objective within the Algerian educational system, particularly outside philosophy and select language classes where explicit pedagogical approaches are recommended but rarely practiced. Analysis reveals that despite curriculum designers' intentions to foster learner autonomy and 21st-century skills through active learning and project-based strategies, classroom realities persistently favor rote memorization and standardized testing, limiting opportunities for deeper reasoning and reflection (Dali Youcef, 2023, Chergui, 2024, Baghoussi, 2021).

Educators in both secondary and higher education demonstrate awareness of the importance of critical thinking and sometimes employ methodologies such as discussion, debate, and problem-solving. However, these approaches remain sporadic, hindered by institutional inertia, limited teacher autonomy, and entrenched traditions of teacher-centered delivery. The gap between policy and practice is perpetuated by insufficient professional development, overcrowded classrooms, and a lack of resources to support inquiry-based or collaborative learning.

This study reaffirms the urgent need to cultivate a critical sense in Algerian students and calls for systemic reform rooted in philosophical pedagogy, transversal curriculum modules, and innovative assessment. Positioning Algeria within a broader global movement toward reflective, autonomous education is essential for preparing learners to meet contemporary scientific, civic, and economic challenges. Teachers must find pathways to adapt curricula and create classroom environments conducive to critical engagement, while policymakers and institutions should support sustained development of reasoning, argumentation, and critical reflection at all educational phases.

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