DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING CAPACITY FOR VIETNAMESE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Developing students' critical thinking capacity is an important part of the process of improving the quality of training in Vietnamese universities today. Critical thinking is one of the most vital skills that students need to be equipped with. The paper presents and analyzes some general theoretical issues concerning the development of critical thinking competency, as well as presents some limitations and disadvantages of critical thinking development, proposing practical solutions to promote the effectiveness of developing critical thinking capacity in Vietnamese students today.

Key Words: Critical thinking capacity, students, Vietnamese.

1. INTRODUCTION

Training people to develop comprehensively with the ability to think critically and fulfill the higher demands of society for the formation of global citizens is an urgent requirement of our education sector. Especially in the current trends of globalization, internationalization and information explosion of the industrial revolution 4.0, the traditional teaching model where students are passive in their thinking and uncritically accept teachers' opinions is no longer suitable. The modern classroom and educational environment in the 4.0 technology era will be equipped with smart devices and software, which help develop learners' mindset and stimulate their creativity. Students will access many sources of knowledge as well as rich and diverse cultures around the world. Therefore, students themselves need to create new knowledge independently; build their own opinions; have the ability to evaluate and criticize facts, points of view, and events in a scientific and creative manner; actively acquire knowledge and master scientific knowledge. Moreover, there are positive innovations in university education following the Resolution of the 13th National Party Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam, which is to keep innovating, synchronize basic elements of education, and focus on developing learners' qualities and capacities. Strongly shift the educational process from mainly equipping knowledge to comprehensively developing capacities and qualities of students (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021). In order to enhance the quality of training, the university teaching process not only provides knowledge for students but also aims to develop their thinking and practice abilities. In particular, critical thinking capacity plays a very important role, increasing students' ability to apply learned knowledge to examine and evaluate study problems in an adequate, accurate, flexible, creative manner. Thus, the development of critical thinking for university students in Vietnam today is essential.

2. A REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE
2.1. Some general theoretical issues on developing critical thinking capacity of students

Critical thinking is not only a widely accepted educational goal but also an indispensable means of imparting and acquiring knowledge. Critical thinking may have been formed over 2.400 years ago in the ideas of the great ancient Greek philosopher Socrates. He proposed the Socratic questioning, or the method of elenchus. This method is used to solve a problem by breaking a problem down into a series of questions where the answers gradually distill the answer a person is looking for. Any conclusion that leads to a contradiction will be rejected. Although Socrates approached the issue of critical thinking more than 2,000 years ago, the definition of critical thinking by John Dewey - an American philosopher, psychologist, and educator - is well known. J. Dewey calls critical thinking "reflective thinking" and defines it as active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends. Thus, critical thinking comes from the ability to reason and evaluate inferences actively and continuously (i.e., self-questioning, self-searching for relevant information, etc.), and take information into account carefully before drawing conclusions. On that basis, beliefs and awareness of knowledge are formed.

It can be said that providing a full and exact definition of critical thinking is extremely difficult. Generally speaking, critical thinking can be understood as thinking critically, analyzing, evaluating and seeking information with a positive skepticism, then reasoning and proving the argument with verified information to draw a final convincing conclusion in accordance with the reality and logic to solve the problems posed.

Critical thinking, at its simplest, is the ability to receive and process information, analyze and evaluate situations based on scientific or unscientific hypotheses and evidence in order to solve social life problems positively. Evaluation capacity is manifested in intellectual standards, including clarity, precision, accuracy, relevance, logic, significance, depth, breadth and fairness. Critical thinkers will apply those intellectual standards when identifying and analyzing problems, making inference and evaluating relevant information, and solving problems (Tran, 2013).

Today, developing critical thinking of university students is basically the process of forming and developing thinking skills to help them think positively, ask themselves questions, evaluate, research and solve problems critically, systematically, logically, objectively, and creatively. This plays a huge role in nurturing knowledge of students, helping them acquire and accumulate knowledge, improve their analytical ability, and effectively solve general theoretical and practical issues of learning. Moreover, university students are a high-quality human resource of Vietnam, so they must possess critical thinking. This competency which should be formed during the university years is considered an important foundation for increasing the thinking level of future scientific researchers. Particularly, its role is also emphasized in important policies of the Party and State.

Critical thinking plays a crucial role in human life, which helps people actively approach new things and advances in thinking and actions. They will think out of the box, easily recognize and eliminate outdated concepts and ideas; be ready to accept new things and social progress. At the same time, critical thinking also encourages people to seek, discover new ideas and values of the problem as well as consciously look at all problems from new perspectives, bringing new results and stimulating creativity.

With critical thinking, people can overcome one-sided, unilateral, subjective, and voluntarist perspectives by approaching a problem comprehensively and objectively. They can also look at it with different eyes, which allows them to offer different solutions and examine arguments to choose the most optimal solution. When debating, critical thinkers will also be self-aware of listening to others' opinions; be willing to accept objective facts, listen to opposing views, and try to understand the nature of the problem before making conclusions; be courageous to admit when they are wrong and when others are right, which make it easy to establish good relationship with everyone. Critical thinkers often think independently, self-create knowledge, and have their own opinions. However, they are also positive thinkers and regularly review their own perceptions, which enables them to realize their limitations and mistakes in thinking.

Critical thinking helps people discover their natural abilities, motivates them to surpass themselves and self-affirm, forming an independent, creative, and self-reliant mindset. They actively acquire and master knowledge, improve information accessing and processing skills, etc. Critical thinking, moreover, also becomes the driving force for social development. This skill has such great value that it determines the success or failure of social organizations and human progress.

2.2. Some limitations on developing critical thinking capacity of Vietnamese students

Critical thinking education for university students in Vietnam is a process of unifying the orientation and education of the family, the school, and the society, combined with the academic efforts of students. In order to improve the effectiveness of critical thinking education for university students, they are required to have a sense of self-discipline, determination and the ability to gain knowledge in a logical, scientific, and objective manner. However, in reality, there are still limitations of competencies and self-consciousness in receiving and transforming basic knowledge as well as social professional knowledge into theirs. (Do, 2012).

One of the limitations that prevents students' critical thinking from fully developing is the influence of the "unchanged" mindset. This creates an old-fashioned thinking that makes them afraid to change and renew thoughts. Performing repetitive tasks makes people passive. They are content with what they have at present, make no effort to analyze and investigate things, and gradually forget their abilities. As a result, a passive mindset is formed, focusing on existing experiences rather than encouraging creativity.

On the one hand, this mindset helps "integrate into the world more easily and naturally with fewer worries, fights, and unnecessary struggles with a simple outlook on life in harmony with nature and peace-loving thinking" (Vu, 2017). However, the unchanged mindset often makes Vietnamese people afraid to argue, learn, consider the nature of the problem, and fight against the evils of society. Instead of focusing on breaking news on politics, economy, and society, people focus on game shows and overrate the living slogan "Stop worrying and watch reality TV shows" (Nguyen, 2015). In addition, Vietnamese people are also influenced by Confucianism. Confucianism emphasizes the hierarchical relationship, thereby forming the mentality of "status" (if you are not in that position, do not discuss the work of that position). This thought has been deeply rooted in the mindset of Vietnamese people, which hinders them from absorbing democratic ideas and thinking critically. The "unchanged" mindset is also the reason why the young generation are not willing to deepen their professional knowledge, afraid to discuss, and

argue with lecturers. On the other hand, Vietnamese people are brilliant and sensitive to new things, but they lack basic knowledge and are poor at practicing and being creative because of learning theory without practice and by rote. As a result, they cannot adapt to the new economy with its rich knowledge and constant changes. When graduating, they are not adequately equipped with professional knowledge and skills, especially critical thinking skills to meet the requirements of recruiters in the 4.0 industrial revolution.

Besides the "unchanged" mindset, it cannot be denied that twenty-first century students are dynamic and sensitive. They are well-educated and engaged in all academic and social activities. They also have a sense of responsibility for their actions and struggle to preserve beauty. However, the stormy development of the revolution industry 4.0 plus the connection to the virtual world stronger than ever, university students will be at risk of being trapped in the media if they have poor critical thinking.

First and foremost, it must be affirmed, in the decline of traditional values and the development of Western thinking, that communications and social media play a major role. "Press, broadcasting, television, especially the Internet are the ways of spreading Western culture to students. The communications explosion has increased the possibility of students keeping up-to-date with information about Western culture, orienting them towards new global cultural values" (Pham, 2018). With a population of more than 96 million and an urbanization rate of 35 percent, the number of Internet users in Vietnam in 2018 reached 64 million, accounting for 67 percent. If considering only Facebook, Vietnam ranked 7th among the countries with the highest number of users, with 59 million as of July 2018. Besides, many other social networks have been developed by the national units in Vietnam since early this year. In particular, it is noteworthy that more than 22 million schoolchildren, students, and millions of other learners in various training systems have participated in social networks (Nguyen, 2020). This creates a challenge that students must have information processing skills so that they are not affected by that huge amount of information. However, today's students lack the skills and knowledge to "resist" the temptation and unverified misinformation on Facebook. "Social networks are virtual and rapidly change with diverse information, so users must have information processing skills and assess the impact of social networks on themselves. The needs of young people to express their individuality are great, but their abilities cannot meet them" (Nguyen, 2020).

With more than 22 million students using social media today, social networks have a significant effect on their studies, work and other aspects of their lives. Social networking sites offer the opportunity for students to approach new mindsets, lifestyles, and values. However, the lack of knowledge, skills, experience, and courage essential to deal with a huge amount of information, sometimes intentional information, and other negative problems can leave bad consequences in their thought and lifestyle (Pham, 2018). To limit unexpected consequences, students must learn and develop critical thinking skills to be able to consider, analyze information, and use social networks properly.

2.3. Some solutions to improve critical thinking capacity for Vietnamese students today
Firstly, raise lecturers' awareness of critical thinking skills

To improve critical thinking capacity of students, first of all, lecturers must be fully aware and capable of thinking critically. In modern education, learners are considered as the center of the educational process, while lecturers play a role in orienting learning activities. If lecturers do not possess the proper perception and critical thinking skills, they cannot help students practice this skill. Without critical thinking skills, they cannot make questions and give directions to their students. To this end, lecturers must constantly innovate their thinking, positive teaching methods, and practice critical thinking skills themselves. More importantly, they must develop this skill when they are students of pedagogical faculty. Future teachers must be trained by positive methods of teaching which focus on nurturing competencies for students. Only when experiencing, can pedagogical students understand this teaching method, thereby applying it to their own teaching in the future. Once educators shift to the learner-centered teaching method which promotes the subjectivity and positiveness of learners, they will have a good foundation for teaching students critical thinking skills.

Secondly, innovate teaching methods of teachers

To develop students' critical thinking capacity, lecturers must promote the positiveness in the teaching process through the flexible and effective use of pedagogical methods, including critical pedagogy. This method aims at providing learners with tools to develop capacities and enhance democracy for effective teaching. Therefore, teaching staff are required to have knowledge about the formation mechanism, development and expression of thinking from a psychological perspective, as well as about the forms of thinking in logic and reflective thinking. Lecturers educate in the direction of analyzing and explaining study problems from different angles to help students acquire necessary skills, knowledge, and critical thinking. This educational method will develop learners' intelligence, arouse their desire to explore, acquire knowledge, and be creative. The application of critical pedagogy helps lecturers link the curriculum and theory as well as students' experiences, making knowledge relevant to both of them. This distinguishes this method from the traditional teaching method which mainly provides students with skills and professional knowledge at different levels but does not foster creativity, focuses on the educational trend of "students write what the teacher reads", and aims to "learn to take exams". Therefore, lecturers must have a critical pedagogical approach, combine well with other positive teaching methods, actively create problems, encourage students to debate and think critically, orient them to self-identify, and draw conclusions. Hence, it can be seen that critical thinking and the above teaching methods have a dialectical relationship with each other. On the one hand, critical thinking creates a premise for effective implementation of those teaching methods; on the other hand, through teaching activities of the above methods, critical thinking is increasingly shaped and developed (Le, 2008).

Thirdly, create an environment and conditions for students to participate in class discussions and debates.

Discussion is a very important activity during and after the lesson. By discussing and debating issues, students can express their perspectives and opinions and put forward arguments based on the collected information. During class discussion and debate, they will know how their opinions and other opinions are right or wrong, and learn from experiences. When debating, they also practice comparing, analyzing, synthesizing, evaluating, and to name just a few, which are important skills of critical thinking. The process of debate and discussion gives students

opportunities to express themselves, practice basic thinking skills, create confidence in their abilities, motivate them to go beyond their limits, and affirm themselves.

There are a lot of opinions during a debate and discussion, so lecturers need to be well-prepared and create a welcoming atmosphere where students can feel free to express their views. Lecturers can also create small groups to perform a certain task, thereby not only promoting critical thinking of each student but also training them to work in groups, respect and listen to other opinions. This is one of the important qualities of critical thinking competency.

Fourthly, promote the dynamism and creativity of students in accessing information.
Connecting and spreading information quickly in the industrial revolution 4.0 not only has beneficial values, but also poses many negative effects related to ethical problems and cultural behavior among young people, including students. Therefore, students should form a habit of observing carefully, thinking deeply and questioning every problem in life. An effective method before, during and after the process of critical thinking is to use the 5W1H (What - When - Where - Why - Who - How) to start with questions and find answers to those questions. Making such questions will help students look at a problem from different perspectives, practice their ability to evaluate it objectively and fairly, and at the same time avoid being emotional and one-sided when identifying and solving the problem.

The above measures are the most important ones in training and developing critical thinking skills for university students. These measures must be carried out simultaneously, synchronously, and combined with each other to bring the best result.

3. CONCLUSION
Soft skills are one of the indispensable factors in the learning and training process, especially for students who are making the effort to cultivate their knowledge and skills for their future career path. It must be mentioned that critical thinking is an important and essential skill that needs to be equipped for students. With its major role in students' cognitive activities and practical improvement, critical thinking affects acquiring knowledge, forming thinking methods and students' thinking capacity, contributing to raising their awareness, practicing scientific thinking methods, and properly orienting their creative learning activities. At the same time, developing their critical thinking will overcome the limitations of passive old-fashioned thinking and traditional teaching methods, gradually improving the quality of university education today.

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