Online Education in Uzbekistan: Enhancing Critical Thinking and Transformation

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Abstract: The term "transformative learning" signifies the expansion of one's awareness following a shift in fundamental worldview and specific capabilities. Online education offers a platform for cultivating various skills, with critical thinking being just one of them. This essay explores the essence of critical thinking, addressing the challenges of fostering it in the realm of online education and proposing potential solutions. Additionally, the significance of transformative learning in Uzbek higher education institutions is highlighted. The focus is on how this process contributes to an individual's overall development, acknowledging that critical thinking is a pivotal aspect among the manifold abilities attainable through online education.

1   INTRODUCTION

When it comes to learning, the majority of people associate it with formal education in settings such as schools, colleges, and universities. Formal learning settings are those in which students are expected to get an education of the highest quality. They think that education may help individuals improve their performance and ability, allowing them to find a better job that is also more meaningful, while also allowing them to make more money in the profession that they choose. On the other hand, lifelong learning refers to learning throughout one's whole life, beginning before birth and continuing beyond death. Education is simply one of many possible techniques of learning, since there are many other ways to increase one's knowledge and acquire practical skills during the course of one's life. Learners throughout their lives are motivated to learn new things and develop themselves because they desire to. It signifies an effort that is both conscious and purposeful on the part of individuals. People choose to develop themselves and further their education because they believe it will make them more aware of the world around them and provide them with more and better opportunities to improve their level of life. Last but not least, it helps one grow farther in their chosen field. The idea of continuous education throughout one's life is intertwined and interdependent with a number of other concepts, including learning organization, learning society, permanent education, recurrent education, ongoing education, and continuing education.

The ability of learners to critically reflect on their own learning via the use of personal experience, suggestions, assertions, sentiments, and mental imaginations for the purposes of production and interpretation evaluation is essential to transformative learning. Learning that is transformative causes the learner to undergo personal transformation as a result. Jack Mezirow, an American sociologist, is the person credited as the originator, developer, and pioneer of "transformative learning." The foundation of the transformational learning technique is a step-by-step shift in one's frame of reference, or worldview. The goals of learning might be in the form of tangible, short- or long-term points that are materially focused. In his essay titled "Transformative learning: theory to practice," Mezirow compares the process of learning to achieving goals such as getting a driver's license or advancing in one's job. On the other hand, the sociologist believes that the ultimate purpose of education is to teach students how to think for themselves. In addition, it is not the job of a teacher who works with people to assist those students in achieving their short-term objectives; rather, it is the teacher's responsibility to assist those students in developing their critical thinking skills.

Due to the rapidity with which social conditions are changing, educational institutions are under continual obligation to assist students in the

development of critical thinking abilities as well as other talents that will enhance their adaptation to shifting environments throughout their careers. The premise also argues that in order for teachers to properly educate their pupils, they need to be able to adapt to changing circumstances themselves. Updating teaching strategies, as seen by the use of cutting-edge technology in the classroom, is often regarded as unequivocal evidence that a teacher has effectively adjusted to a new kind of educational setting. To make effective use of today's technology in the classroom, educators need to be equipped not just with the relevant technical abilities, but also with subject-matter expertise and an awareness of best teaching practices. To put it another way, this concept is referred to as "technology pedagogical content knowledge," and its paradigm is referred to as the "TPCK model." Teachers are more ready to experiment with technology in the classroom because they are more receptive to the idea of class reform and view their educational role as one that contributes to the development of a knowledge society.

Critical thinking and the use of technology are becoming more important in today's globally connected educational environment. The goal of motivating students to acquire critical thinking skills is to push them to attain critical ideals, a sense of creativity, and the need for cognitive thinking. Teachers do this through encouraging students to develop critical thinking abilities. Students are taught to use the critical thinking technique, which encourages them to connect their thoughts and ideas with real elements that are pertinent to the context in which they are being considered. As a consequence of this, children will acquire the skills necessary to think critically, react, and discover solutions by taking into consideration the things that are in their immediate environment. Meanwhile, advances in technology are generally seen as positive additions to the classrooms of today.

Learners' productivity, particularly the growth of analytical reasoning abilities, should be enhanced through the use of technology in higher education, such as online education. Students may be given a better chance to cultivate their interests and learn more by combining critical thinking with web-based activities like asynchronous online chat. This fact, however, makes it challenging for educators to introduce critical thinking skills and coordinate their implementation in e-learning at the same time. This case study discusses the potential of online or digital learning platforms to foster analytical reasoning in higher education students. The study's goal is to examine the value of critical thinking concepts in a digital classroom, identify potential stumbling blocks that teachers could face, and provide a variety of strategies for overcoming these difficulties.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The phrase "critical thinking" has come to be commonly used to describe this kind of "cognitive" thinking. Critical thinking is defined in a variety of ways by various academics. Critical thinking, as defined by Scriven and Paul, is "the systematic mental process of conceiving, implementing, analysing, digesting, and evaluating knowledge received via observation, experience, judgment, debate, or information exchange in order to comprehend and react." This definition suggests that critical thinking is a multifaceted and flexible procedure for understanding, interpreting, and assessing particular information in a range of contexts - Tathahira, T. (2020).

When it comes to career success, critical thinking is more than just a mindset; it's a skill that's increasingly in demand. Chartrand, Ishikawa, and Flanigan ranked critical thinking as a more crucial ability required for future relevant job experience than creativity and information and technology knowledge. From the above, it is evident that critical thinking is associated with cognitive capacity and the process of higher-level thinking, both of which are essential in the workplace. That's why it's so important for kids to have classroom experience with critical thinking before joining the profession.

Mezirow's theory of transformative learning draws on the work of other philosophers like Kuhn and Habermas for its ideas and methods. Mezirow drew on the work of other philosophers to discuss concepts like "disorienting dilemmas," "frames of reference," "meaning perspectives and schemes," "perspective modification," "habits of mind," and "critical self-reflection." A broad definition of transformational learning theory is an approach to education that emphasizes a sea change in the values, attitudes, and worldviews of adult students. This change in perspective has far-reaching effects on how one thinks and what one does in the world. Therefore, this change calls for higher-quality critical reflection and cognition to construct alternative meaning-making frameworks. In this process of transformation, meaning structures can only be changed by the use of critical thinking and reflection on context, content, method, or propositions. Shifting one's frame of reference may lead to new insights and new ways of thinking about the world, including new

ideas, attitudes, ethical beliefs and values, cultural meanings and understandings, and abstract and aesthetic ideals.

3 ANALYSIS

3.1 Challenges of Critical Thinking Promotion in Online Education

The rapid development of new technology and the emergence of pandemic conditions have increased the importance of online learning in today's educational setting. Internet-based exercises may help students improve their critical thinking abilities. Online courses often include instructor-student dialogue, which is meant to stimulate students' awareness as they understand online processes, evaluate material, and arrive at conclusions. Competent students and lifelong learners will have developed the habit of critical thinking, which will help them make sense of the material they find online, assess its credibility, and integrate it into their learning processes. The focus of these exercises is the application of critical thinking and self-reflection. The goal of any online course should be to promote critical thinking to disseminate information and foster collaborative discussions.

It is also argued that the cognitive part of the mind may be more easily acclimated to remote education. Teachers also need to exercise caution when choosing online content for use in distance learning. Due to its widespread practical applicability, critical thinking has flourished in various online contexts, such as chat rooms, message boards, and email. Teachers have found success using online discussion forums to train and develop deeper, more analytical learning among their students in part because of the emphasis placed on debate and the exchange of ideas. Numerous studies have shown that students' use of the internet has a favorable effect on their academic performance. Studying online has the potential to enhance students' understanding and application of critical thinking principles.

Despite the many benefits, educators, especially teachers, often struggle to find effective ways to integrate critical thinking into online learning. Several challenges, spanning several dimensions (social, cultural, theoretical, practical, methodological, and technical), are presented in relation to the implementation of critical thinking through online learning. The sociocultural context is the starting point for any discussion of critical thinking.

Since Western-oriented critical thinking is different from the Oriental academic system and culture, Asian students like Japanese and Chinese ones were unable to communicate the idea of critical thinking in their writing course in English. This study was conducted by Stapleton back in 2001. The lack of opportunities for students to practice critical thinking is not merely a problem of culture. In social practice, critical thinking remains a complex topic. While critical thinking is a novel approach to problem solving, it shouldn't excite pupils with the promise of a world they've never seen before, illuminated by their unique passions and the empirical tools they've been given to examine it.

The second crucial factor, though, is how teachers may choose a topic that's appropriate for their students' level of critical thinking and their ability to grasp it. The ability to recognize recurring themes is seen as essential for the advancement of rationality as a skill that demonstrates critical thinking habits. A lack of critical analysis was obvious in the essay topics that Japanese ESL college students selected, as shown in research by Stapleton. Therefore, teachers need to pay particular attention to situating themselves in terms of the socio-cultural values developed in promoting critical thinking in different situations.

Teachers and professors in higher education need to develop and choose effective strategies and methods for fostering critical thinking via online discussion and debate. With the explosion in popularity of online education in recent years, teachers have been compelled to find the most effective ways to organize their courses for students. It's clear that some teachers are still getting the hang of how to use the latest educational technologies. It seems that some educators lack the background necessary to determine and implement the most effective strategies for fostering critical thinking via the use of online activities. The situation becomes more complicated as a direct result of the widespread use of online higher education courses and the attendant rise in importance placed on critical thinking. Traditional barriers to developing critical thinking have been exacerbated by a general lack of faculty familiarity with excellent online teaching practices. In a nutshell, we are now experiencing the inherent characteristics of technological pre-eminence. Students who have only ever learned in a traditional classroom environment with a focus on the instructor's instruction may need more time to acclimate to the more independent nature of remote learning.

3.2 Potential Strategies to Overcome the Challenges

Educators have the option to choose from a variety of strategies proven effective in overcoming barriers to critical thinking in online courses. Potential approaches to the teaching and learning process include the one selected, as well as the scientific and conceptual approaches employed by lecturers in online seminars. E-learning rests on four main pedagogical pillars: course material, teaching methods, practice patterns, and student evaluations. Teachers are tasked with helping their students become better critical thinkers by incorporating critical thinking ideas into the coursework they teach. The assignment may influence students' critical attitudes and retention of information gained from the reading. Additionally, creating new online activities is a certain way to pique students' interest in any digital classroom. Students' development, familiarity with digital learning, and degree of engagement all play a role in how well internet-based resources foster critical thinking in the context of higher education.

Online learning activities should be designed with teachers as instructors in mind. According to this body of research, teachers should play the role of facilitator when working with students in an online environment. This includes, but is not limited to, outlining course material, keeping discussions on track, introducing students to contrasting points of view, guiding them through the platform, and encouraging appropriate behavior. The presence of educators is crucial to establishing the seriousness of the discussion. If instructors have the capacity, integrity, and inspiration to discriminate among the dialogue that is necessary to be generated by divergence and provide additional clarity to learners' opinions, students will try to articulate and verbalize their judgments. In light of that proclamation, teachers are obligated to deliver necessary training and materials through double communication amongst pupils even if they themselves are absent from the learning assembly. Having the teacher actively participate in directing the discussion is crucial for inspiring pupils to use higher-order thinking skills. A teacher-led discussion on a web-based learning platform or online forum is a great technique to promote critical thinking among students, at least in theory. As a result, there is widespread agreement that well-crafted discussion questions are essential for developing advanced levels of critical thinking. Teachers should also effectively model and provide time for students to reflect on and evaluate their thinking as they read, synthesize the material they've covered, and contribute to a variety of group conversations.

Additionally, both student-teacher and student-student online cooperation should go well. Offering group assignments to students as part of an online community has been shown to be effective. The use of critical thinking skills in a group setting is an excellent approach to developing such skills. Peer feedback activities enhance students' ability to think critically because students must plan out and anticipate their peers' responses. This assertion makes sense, as students will be able to relax, learn to value and incorporate the perspectives of their peers, and engage in open and fruitful dialogue about and debate over a variety of topics during group and peer activities, as well as question and challenge the ideas and beliefs of others. In order to encourage active learning, educators might design engaging projects. Students in an online course may be capable of actively developing their skills and getting a fresh perspective on the world through a guided project.

However, in virtual classrooms, the success of these strategies relies on the knowledge, care, patience, and development of the teachers. The development of critical thinking abilities is a key goal of online education, and some studies have shown that certain instructional styles taught in online courses may facilitate this goal. The pupils were reportedly directed to engage in questioning exercises on specific health topics, where they argued and discussed critical steps that should be taken to solve a particular health condition. Additionally, AOD (Asynchronous Online Discussion) panels are seen by students as a community-based resource for fostering dedication and fostering critical thinking.

3.3 The Role of Transformative Learning in Uzbek Higher Education System

Research studies reveal that critical reflection or thinking is required for transformational learning, inspiration, and motivation, despite the fact that there are many different and frequently contradicting opinions on critical thinking and transformative learning theories. Maturity entails the development of one's own capacity for autonomous learning and thought. A person's worldview is formed without taking into account their interests, values, thoughts, or emotions. Family beliefs, personality traits, and life experiences are shaped by religious and cultural norms. Individuals may benefit from this process of independent thought because it helps them acquire the critical thinking abilities essential to functioning in a

free and just society. Teaching students to think critically and independently is a primary focus in higher education. Students are more likely to be encouraged to think critically on their own terms and to alter ingrained principles of thought, action, or solution construction. This is accomplished when the instructor encourages and rewards student engagement in class discussions, whether conducted in-person or online. In addition, students understand that their efforts are being examined and assessed when exams, case studies, and other assignments are graded promptly, and useful feedback is provided.

In a classroom where the teacher has all the power, students won't feel comfortable challenging established beliefs and won't have the chance to develop their own unique perspectives.

Institutions, universities, and colleges should prepare students to become contributing members of society by immersing them in the local culture and fostering an appreciation for universal moral and ethical principles. Therefore, the established and developed educational system and curriculum should think about the aforementioned learning methodologies and encourage individuals to participate in critical reflection in order to be critical citizens. Whether or if the locals will be provided with enough resources and a stimulating atmosphere in which to grow is crucial.

4 CONCLUSION

To summarize, contemporary education is characterized by the seamless integration of critical thinking and digital tools. The ability to think critically holds greater significance in today's interconnected society, and it is emphasized as a desirable outcome in modern classrooms. Additionally, technological innovations such as online education exert a significant influence on various aspects of today's educational infrastructure. Regardless of their personal sentiments, teachers are obligated to acquaint themselves with technology.

The use of e-learning as a means to cultivate critical thinking among students has received widespread acclaim. However, educators will encounter unique challenges in terms of practicality and implementation. For many Asian countries, including Uzbekistan, Japan, and others in the East, establishing critical thought is beset with sociocultural challenges. Furthermore, it is challenging for educators to develop and select suitable topics and methods due to technical and

practical issues linked to instructors' familiarity with the new online environment.

In conclusion, teachers contemplate several strategies to address these challenges. These include presenting the right subject, incorporating engaging activities tied to the content of vital concepts, and implementing well-crafted online discussions and group assignments.

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