CRITICAL THINKING AND TOURISM MANAGEMENT STUDENTS

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Abstract: *In this paper, the authors are dealing with the issue of developing critical thinking in higher education, more specifically in the case of tourism management students. The four-phase inquiry model – each with its descriptor, indicator(s) and specific sociocognitive processes and the five main rules of critical thinking – is highlighted from the perspective of the impact of critical thinking on the development and improvement of critical thinking skills and dispositions and student achievement, from the perspective of the considerable impact on students' total scores and from the perspective of critical thinking skills and habits depending on the level of students.*

Key words*: critical thinking, tourism, management, students*

INTRODUCTION

Developing critical thinking in higher education means forming intellectuals with a critical spirit by developing general reasoning skills [10,8]. Critical thinking involves [4,9]:

- one goal: the reasonable and rational use of reflection to interpret the world, resulting in the liberation of the intellect;
- a goal: cultivating critical thinking skills and dispositions (reasonable, reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do);
- *involvement*: using others (colleagues, teachers, resources) as a means of cultivating cognitive skills and critical dispositions;
- a purpose of teaching critical thinking: teaching critical thinking skills and dispositions in order to create better thinkers;
- an agenda: none, as cultural, ethical, moral, and political issues are excluded as necessary topics for discussion (critical thinking can in principle be done using abstract formal mathematical entities and variables);
- an attitude: impartiality in issues is a key virtue and is, itself, a disposition for critical thinking;
- a broader context: non-relational, because the social and political context is independent of critical thinking;
- criticism of others: the critical thinking movement is blind to critical thinking about its own premises and assumptions.

Critical thinking, that is, the objective analysis and evaluation of a problem in order to form a judgment [7,12], is required of tourism management students in both full-time and distance learning courses [5,13], in which case critical thinking includes creativity, problem solving, intuition and insight and is based on a four-phase model of practical inquiry that reflects the process of critical thinking and the means of creating cognitive presence [5,14]:

- The first phase, the initiation of critical inquiry, is considered the triggering event, when a dilemma/problem (arising from experience) is identified/recognized:
  - *descriptive*: evocative;
  - *indicator*: recognition of the problem, feeling of bewilderment;
  - *sociocognitive processes*: presenting basic information culminating in a question, asking the question, messages that take the discussion in a new direction;

- The second phase, exploration, is the phase in which participants move from the private, reflective world of the individual to the social exploration of ideas, and in which students must perceive or understand the nature of the problem and then move on to a more complete exploration of relevant information:
  - *descriptive*: curious;
  - *indicator*: divergence – within the online community, divergence – in a single message, exchange of information, suggestions to consider, brainstorming, jumping to conclusions;
  - *sociocognitive processes*: unfounded contradiction of previous ideas, many different ideas/themes presented in a single message, personal narratives/descriptions/facts (not used as evidence to support a conclusion), author explicitly characterizes message as exploration, adds to established points but does not systematically defend/justify/develop the addition, offers unsupported opinions;
- The third phase, integration, is the phase in which meaning is built from the ideas generated in the previous phase, and in which students begin to evaluate the applicability of the ideas related to connecting and describing the problem/event:
  - *descriptive*: experimental;
  - *indicator*: convergence between group members, convergence – in a single message, connecting ideas, synthesis, creating solutions;
  - *sociocognitive processes*: reference to the previous message followed by a reasoned agreement; building, adding to the ideas of others; justified, developed, justifiable, but provisional hypotheses; integration of information from various sources – textbooks, articles, personal experience; explicit characterization of the message as a solution by the participant;
- fourth phase, solving the dilemma/problem through direct or indirect action, i.e. implementing the proposed solution or testing the hypothesis through practical application:
  - *descriptive*: employee;
  - *indicator*: indirect application in the real world, testing solutions, defense solutions;
  - *sociocognitive processes*: none, coded.

The relative frequency of the above cognitive categories is graphically represented in Figure 1.

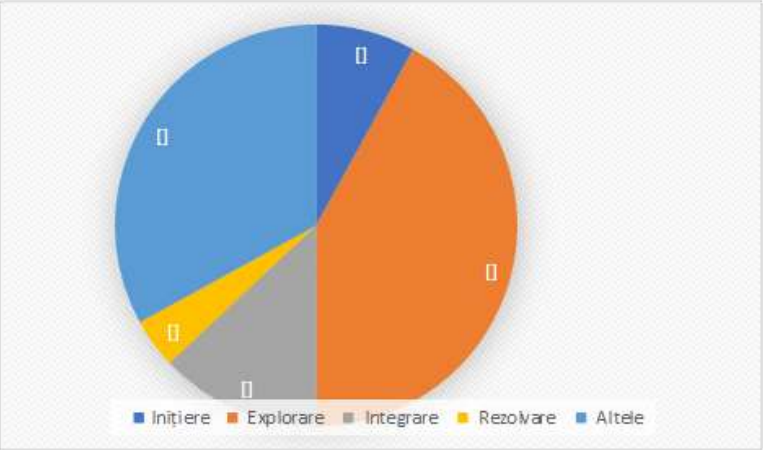

Figure 1. Relative frequency of cognitive categories of the critical thinking process [5].

According to Ünsar & Engin [11], there are five main rules of critical thinking:

- communication skills: the person who thinks critically should be able to convey their ideas in an effective way by organizing them;
- APPLICATION: the person who thinks critically should be able to transform what they have understood into a model;
- competence: the person who thinks critically should be able to use their experiences and their results;
- consistency: the person who thinks critically should be able to eliminate the contrasts that exist in thinking;
- consolidation: the person who thinks critically should be able to see all aspects of thinking.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The material used in this study consists of articles and books about critical thinking in particular (tourism management), and the research method consists of analyzing the content of the results presented in this research.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Abrami [1] examined the impact of instruction on the development and improvement of critical thinking skills and dispositions and student achievement and found that there are effective strategies for teaching both generic and content-specific critical thinking skills and dispositions at all educational levels and across all subject areas. Opportunities for dialogue, exposure to authentic or staged problems and examples, and mentoring had positive effects on critical thinking skills.

Slameto [8] measured the success rate of future teachers and found that the habit of critical thinking was affected by the instructional contexts that enabled a new situation, the preparation of graduates to enter the information communication technology community, the prerequisite (i.e. mastery of previous course materials), and the student's learning motivation to reach 81%. The habit of critical thinking of graduates of (51.20%) was determined by the role of the teacher in developing the instructional contexts that enabled a new situation.

Benitez [2] assessed the ability of hospitality and tourism students to logically analyze arguments, deductions, inferences, and assumptions, and to interpret information in different hospitality and tourism-related scenarios. The researcher concluded that, of the four indicators of critical thinking, inference (the reasoning involved in drawing a conclusion or making a logical judgment based on circumstantial evidence and previous conclusions, rather than on direct observation), interpretation (the act of explaining, reframing, or otherwise showing one's own understanding of something), and argument (strong) are moderately to strongly positively associated with students' total scores, while deduction and assumption are only slightly positively associated. Regarding critical thinking skills, they are defined in Table 1 below.

Table 1.

Critical thinking skills [9]

AUTHORIZED	Definition
Analytical ability (to analyze)	Ability to collect, organize, synthesize, and examine information and assumptions
Inference ability (to make inferences)	The ability to generate solutions to a problem and use information to make sound judgments and/or draw logical conclusions
Evaluation ability (to evaluate)	The ability to criticize the quality and credibility of sources, arguments, opinions, etc.
Deductive ability (to make deductions)	The ability to follow reasoning from the initial information presented to a proposed solution that is logical and justified
Inductive ability (to make inductions)	The ability to make decisions in uncertain and complex situations, where all the facts may not be available, there are many different perspectives to consider, and/or there are a range of different plausible outcomes resulting from decisions made; the ability to make "educated guesses" based on limited information

In terms of training future tourism managers, the critical thinking process depends on the level of the students. Thus, this process starts from simple information retention and reaches the higher level of creation (Figure 2).

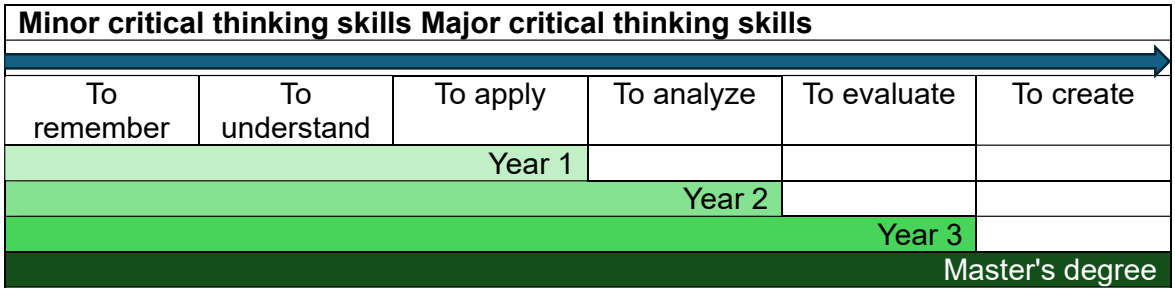

Figure 2. The critical thinking process at the tertiary level [6]

Zuluage, Duque & Narváez [15] proposed diagnosing critical thinking skills in higher education students according to the levels of literal, inferential and critical reading. One of the conclusions reached by the three researchers shows that career profile is a determining factor in the result; that motivation and interest are remarkable in the reading and writing processes; that some students are more argumentative than others; and that students lack critical thinking skills.

Co [3] conducted a study to determine the development of critical thinking skills in teaching general education courses among freshmen students, seeking answers about how teachers and students evaluate their critical thinking skills about analyzing information, drawing conclusions, and making wise decisions, and how respondents evaluate the assessment tools used by teachers. The responses were compared to see how they differed from each other. The study found that either teachers and students had different criteria for measuring the skills, or students rated themselves higher than their teachers rated them on this skill.

CONCLUSIONS

The development of critical thinking in higher education is important because it forms intellectuals with a critical spirit;

- critical thinking it is required for tourism management students (full-time and distance learning courses);

- critical thinking is based on a four-phase inquiry model each with its descriptor, indicator(s) and specific sociocognitive processes;

- critical thinking requires compliance with five main rules;

- numerous researchers have emphasized the impact of critical thinking on the development and improvement of critical thinking skills and dispositions and student achievement, and have developed instruments for measuring the habit of critical thinking in students;

- critical thinking in hospitality and tourism students it has a considerable impact on students' total scores;

Critical thinking skills differ depending on the level of students (1st, 2nd, 3rd year, master's degree).

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