

## **A Study of Critical Thinking as a Mainstream Pedagogical Problem in Pakistan: The State of The Art**

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### **Abstract.**

Critical thinking is an ability of a person to think clearly and logically. There is a traditional method of learning which promotes rote learning but as far as modern times are concerned, thinking critically is important. It helps a person acquire knowledge, improve theories and gain enlightenment. In Pakistan's discourse of education, critical thinking is not a practiced art. One can signal the blame on colonial history as well but the subject matter is more complicated than this. In this study, the researcher wants to find out the reasons why the country is lagging in critical thinking and why it is a less established and less practiced fact in Pakistan. Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed will be taken as a framework to connect the reasons with the causes. Especially, it will be studied how the banking concept of Education has influenced education and the study will then be related to the Pedagogy of Pakistan. For the study mixed-method approach has been chosen by the researcher. Through questionnaires and the mode of the interview, the facts related to critical thinking are researched. Pieces of evidence collected from the research have proven why the country has not yet been able to develop a system of education that promotes the ability to think critically. And it has been recommended that critical thinking must be made part of the education of the country at every level.

**Keywords:** Mainstream, Pedagogical Problems, Critical Thinking, Traditional Method of Learning, Banking Concept of Education.

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### **1. Introduction**

Critical thinking is the ability of a person to think differently. It is according to Bacon (1605) a desire to seek and a readiness to consider. It is related to human's quest for knowledge and it provides a platform to search out the truth of the world. Critical thinking allows a person to think

logically and rationally. According to Sinfield S and Burns T (2016), Critical thinking is about formulating a clear judgment. It depends upon the interpretation and understanding of knowledge and in due process, one might gather information through the process of reading, observation, and experimentation. (p. 94). So, instead of relying on a traditional mode of

learning, one should seek to develop the ability of critical think. This would enable a person to see the realities of the world. All the great philosophers in the world have one thing in common, they use to think and therefore they were able to develop a rationale. Critical thinking has created wonders for the man. Linda E and Paul W (2002) have written in their book, Critical Thinking, that due to the human ability of it, man has revolutionized the communicative ways of the world. It has saved time and provided services (p. 19) It won't be wrong to say that critical thinking has proven to be vital in the lives of humans.

Men have always used their minds to develop critical thinking and ability. The mind plays an important role; therefore, it should be properly trained. It is the mind which shows a person how to think. Even in the age of Puritanism, the great writer Milton (1667) in Paradise Lost talked about the ability of the mind when he says that the mind when it is in its place and itself, can make hell out of heaven and heaven out of hell, signaling the capability of mind in formulating experiences. The mind has every ability to think critically and if the mind has such capacity where it can think freely and critically, it can create wonders.

In all of the world, attention is now being paid to Critical thinking. Many universities and institutions make it their sole motto, not only this, some universities are investing in giving proper degrees and courses in this field. So, in no way is possible its importance could be denied.

In many countries like Pakistan, critical thinking is still a distant dream. Especially in the field of Education, there are many lapses. One is related directly to critical thinking. The country has a history of colonialization. Even after more than seventy years of independence, many aspects of the country's management are linked to the era of colonialization. The main concern which is associated with pedagogy is hardly being addressed. There is an unfortunate situation where at the primary and secondary levels, outdated learning schemes are practiced. The focus is on rote learning. Critical thinking is far from the discourse of education which is posing a problem. In this study, the researcher has focused on Critical thinking and how its absence in the field of education is posing pedagogical problems. The researcher has studied the problem by keeping in mind the ideals of Paulo Freire (1971) in his book Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Freire has talked about the pedagogy of the world, how it has been constructed, and how futile it is for developing and third-world countries. The researcher has tried to figure out the problems with Pakistani Pedagogy by keeping in mind this model of Freire.

### **1.1. Problem Statement**

Critical Thinking is substantial when it comes to the education body of the world. It has been seen that developing countries like Pakistan do not have the mode of Critical thinking in the mainstream body. Instead, the country is led by traditional methods of learning. This is the reason that education is not fully hitting the levels of understanding in the minds of the learners or the students. They follow the

practices of Rote learning therefore they are not able to translate their knowledge into practical use. This study will focus on the aspect of the absence of critical thinking in the education of Pakistan and will suggest ways to expand the quality of education in the country through the implementation of critical thinking.

### **1.2. *Objectives of Research***

This study researches to find out the part of critical thinking in the pedagogy of Pakistan. Also, it aims to study how rote learning has become an important constituent of learning. The researcher targets to study the influences which have made the educational process in Pakistan a robotic procedure. The lack of creativity and critical thinking is remotely found to be present in the general body of pedagogy. Therefore, this study looks forwards to seeing how the educational system has perceived the idea of critical thinking and what could be the possible future of it in the pedagogy of Pakistan.

### **1.3. *Research Questions***

- What is the status of Critical thinking in Pakistan?
- Why the Pedagogy of Pakistan has been conducive to Rote learning rather than Critical thinking?
- Is Critical Thinking useful in the professional life of students in Pakistan?

### **1.4. *Significance of the Research***

This study is significant as it will promote the critical thinking process and will pave the way for the promotion of true education. it will lead to creating a system where minds and thoughts

will be valued rather than degrees and marks. Also, this study will pave how pedagogy will be seen with a new perspective. Old ways will be devalued and ideas coming out of critical thought will be considered important.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. *The ability to Critical Thinking***

Mind is for thinking and human beings are given the ability to think. Naturally, they think and thus they invent. The process of thinking is comparatively straightforward as it is a natural ability. However, it is the ability of critical thinking which is complex and not easy to practice. It is because it requires a lot of background knowledge and critical study. Information makes a mind critical. Critical thinking comes from the brains of the thinking minds which also make use of rationale and logic. It is the style of thinking about any content or about any subject in which the thinker expands the quality of his thought process by dexterously taking command of the structures which are somewhat inherited from him and with the help of it he could impose intellectual standards and additional thinking upon them (Paul and Linda, 2002: 35) It is not a simpler phenomenon. It incorporates the involvement of skills. With the help of the required skills, a person can shape his thinking process and can become a critical thinker. Also, apart from the requirement of specific skills, it is the process of reasoning which is a requirement as well. According to Wood (2002), Critical thinking is a process of using reason and logic. One should be trained enough to discriminate between what is right to what is wrong.

## **2.2. Critical Pedagogy**

Many types of research have been done on Critical Thinking in the past few decades. The goal is to highlight the discrepancies that are present in the educational system and to suggest a solution for it. Also, many studies have highlighted the importance of critical thinking in educational discourses and emphasis has been laid on this particular subject matter. There has been a recent study on the challenges of critical Pedagogy (Kulsoom and Mallick, 2020). The research has highlighted the fact that how the banking model is influencing the Pedagogy of the country. According to the study, the banking model is not empowering the learners and it is not contributing well enough to transforming the state of living of the learners. The major challenges were also discussed in the study. The major problem is that the traditional mode of teaching is being practiced in class (Kulsoom & Mallick, 2020) this traditional mode of teaching is a direct barrier to student-teacher interaction, and therefore less communication is done between the teacher and the students. Also, there has been another reason and it is associated with the lack of appreciation for innovation. A student is not often appreciated when she does some work critically. The creative license is never issued by the teacher to the students. And if the teacher is not ready to appreciate a student, it will lead to the situation of a creative block on the part of the students. They will start relying on the material provided by the teacher and won't do any creative stuff on their own. Thus, according to the findings of the research, it was found that there was more narration rather

than liberation in the pedagogical schemes of the teachers. Although teachers were enthusiastic at the same they were a bit reluctant when it comes to practicing critical thinking in class.

## **2.3. Answer to Extremism**

The concept of critical Thinking as the main priority in the educational system of Pakistan has also been studied by Farhan Akhtar (2019). He has not studied the trends in history but has tried relating the concept of critical thinking with it. He has studied the political era starting right after the birth of Pakistan and observed the social and political change over the decades. The country was seen through the prism of globalization and the progressive outlook was portrayed in the era of the '50s, '60s, and '70s. Then Akhtar (2019) studied the elements of extremism in the decades that came later. He studied how that decade lack a general sense of tolerance and patience. There was less progress and more extremism. And according to the researcher (2019), it is only critical thinking which could cater to the true education needs of the country. Because critical thinking has the true resources which could enrich the mindsets of society. It could only be possible when critical thinking is incorporated into the pedagogy of Pakistan.

## **2.4. Student Teachers Viewpoint**

Lloyd and Bahr (2019) observed the students from the university and asked them about their perception of critical thinking. As the definition is not static and varies from person to person. Lloyd and Bahr (2019) therefore gathered the

viewpoints on critical thinking to see whether they contribute positively to the achievements of the students or not. Students' responses were taken through questionnaires. They were asked to define their definition of Critical thinking. They were also asked to share their bit of experience in which they have to exercise the mode of critical thinking to appear in an assessment. And similarly, teachers were asked to comment on the ability of the students. Whether they exercise their critical ability and make use of it or not. And according to the findings of the study, there is a general sense of confidence that considers critical thinking to be an important part of the education system at the university level.

## **2.5. Theoretical Framework**

Paulo Freire (1970) did revolutionary work in the field of education. The ideas he came up with within his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* are thought-provoking, and in fact, it has paved the way in understanding the general body of education in an oppressed world. If it is looked at Practically, it will be understood that education is a basic necessity that should be given to all in the world without any discrimination. Everyone in the world must have equal opportunity when it comes to education. However, this is not the case with the world. Unfortunately, the ways of the world are not constructed in a way to benefit all. The dominant capitalist class takes advantage. As a result, there is a class that faces suppression. They became oppressed and consequently, they are bound to learn from the already prescribed system of education. Freire (1970) says that they

never learn to unlearn. They have the insights of critical ability in them but they never make use of it. Therefore, they remain oppressed and they are not able to achieve wonders at the economic and social levels. Freire dissected the problem in the field of education and proposed some sound suggestions.

### **2.5.1. Power Relation Dynamic**

Freire (1970) has explained the power relation dynamic at the level of education. And while describing this phenomenon, he talked about the fact that the social barrier between a teacher and student is widening. In a typical classroom environment, he calls a teacher to be a person who is somehow alien to the students. And it is because teachers often don't bother to create a healthy intellectual environment within the class. While they deliver a lecture, a student sees them as the epitome of knowledge and therefore, he never tries to question the teacher. The words of the teachers are taken as the words of Reality. Students instead of understanding them relies on the pattern of memorization. They keep on repeating it unless they memorize it completely. Freire named this relationship and called it a depository relationship. In such a power dynamic relationship, the teacher is the depositor and the students are the depositories. This is the process; he calls mechanical memorization. Students become like empty bottle canes which are to be filled out by the educators. The difference in power status between teachers and students could be seen in the table below.

TEACHERS	STUDENTS
Teachers taught	Students are taught
Knows everything	knows nothing
Teacher talk	student listen
Exercise discipline	they are to be disciplined
They are the subject	They are the object

### 2.5.2. *Creative Space and Thinking*

Freire (1970) has talked about the Banking concept of Education and he has emphasized true knowledge. And according to him, true knowledge always comes from inventions and reinventions. Rote-learning and memorization take students nowhere. They can only learn by knowing the true realities of the world. Therefore, the creative space is need time. And Critical Thinking must be promoted by the teachers so they could learn effectively.

The role of the teacher is very important in this regard. Previously, it was the teacher who mainly prompted the alienation of students in a classroom environment. It was the one who made students, the Others. And to make them more relatable and justifiable in the classroom context, they treated the students as others. A teacher is therefore the one who is an oppressive being in the pedagogical context proposed by Freire (1970). He says that reconciliation on the part of the teacher is needed. And for students to gain true knowledge, the role of the teachers comes in handy.

### 2.5.3. *Problem Posing Model*

This is where the debate comes to a stop. This model is presented by Freire (1970) and it suggests the ways of the ideal scenario when it

comes to Pedagogy. Problem Posing model recommends a solution where students must directly engage themselves in the process of learning. They should initiate dialogue and must know their ways to learn the realities of life. There should be no creative block. Teachers and students must work side by side and there should be no power dynamic relation between the two groups.

## 3. Research Methodology

The research methodology for this research is described below.

### 3.1. *Research Design*

The mixed-method research design has been used by the researcher to conduct this research. Both quantitative, as well as qualitative research design, has been adopted to further this research. Quantitative data has been analyzed by using a window-based program called SPSS or Statistical Package for Social Sciences whereas qualitative analysis of the interview has been done by the researcher.

### 3.2. *Research Tool*

Both surveys and interviews have been conducted for this research. A Likert-type structured questionnaire was constructed and its reliability was first checked with thirty students through Cronbach alpha testing done in the SPSS program. It was then given to the 100 university students of Master level and M. Phil level. All the students belong to the public universities of Multan (Bahu din Zakariya University Multan and Women University

Multan). Random Sampling is done by the researcher for this purpose.

Similarly, five teachers were engaged for interviews. A semi-structured interview was conducted for this purpose and teachers were asked semi-structured questions. Teachers were asked questions related to critical thinking and its implication in a classroom environment.

### **3.3. Setting**

The questionnaire was made online through google docs and spread and filled out via an online link. A description related to the topic was provided within the text of the questionnaire so that the students may be able to understand it fully.

Moreover, the interviews were conducted online on WhatsApp as well as on Zoom Meeting. Due to the restrictions and social distancing imposed by Government for Covid-19, it was impossible to conduct face-to-face interviews. Therefore, online interviews were conducted and recorded.

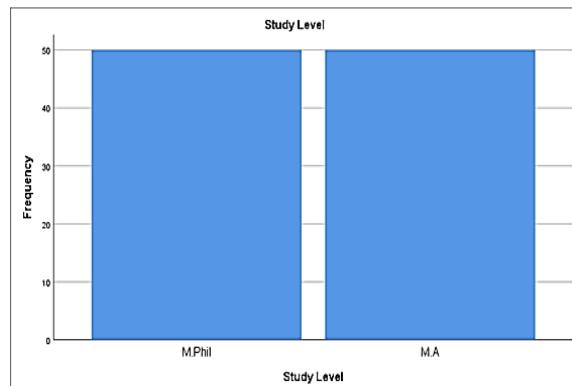
## **4. Data Analysis and Discussion**

The data collected from the questionnaires was analyzed through a popular Software called Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The data was converted into binary form and then the Reliability of it is checked through the Cronbach Alpha test. The results of the test are given in the following Fig. 1.

Cronbach's Alpha Test	Items
.693	15

**Fig. 1. Reliability Test**

As the study was conducted on hundred university-level students, it is seen from the figure below that two groups were focused.

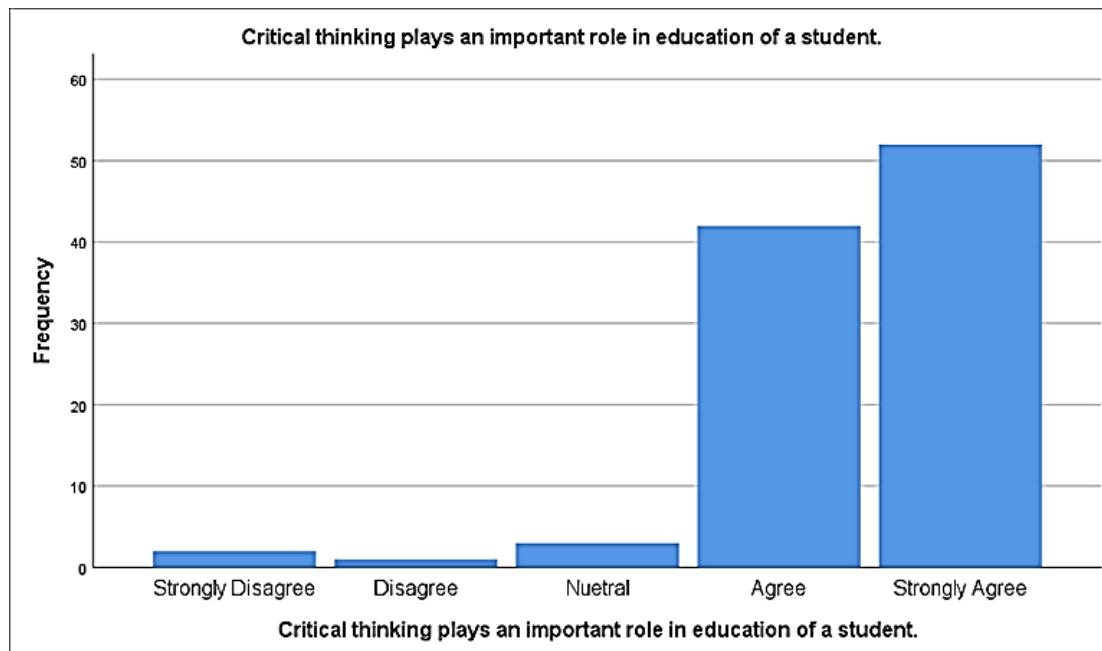


**Fig. 2. Reliability Test**

The total population considered for data collection belongs to the study level of Master or M.Phil. The population and their study background can be evaluated in the figures below. It is both represented in bar chart form (Fig. 2).

### **4.1. Substantial Role of Critical Mindset**

The substantiality of critical thinking could not be ignored in the context of Pakistani Education. Almost 50% of the students strongly agree with the point that critical thinking holds a significant role in the education of students. Moreover, 40% of the students agree. Thus, emphasizing the matter of critical thinking.



**Fig. 3. Critical Thinking Plays an Important Role in Education**

The same question when asked by the teachers was answered similarly. But they justified their point. One of the respondents among teachers comment

“Critical thinking helps a student to think out of the box. You know, it promotes creativity. It is important in higher education. What I believe is, if a student is a critical thinker, then he will know to apply that knowledge and the application of knowledge is important because knowledge won’t be of any use if you do not know how to make use of it.”

From a teacher’s point of view, it is a vital concept and it holds an important role in the education of a student. If a student is well aware, he is a critical thinker, he will think more. Also, he will be able to translate his knowledge practically. He could make good use of what he already knows and can put sense into things.

Also, one of the teachers states; “It is important for the better understanding of the student, okay? We know students cram and to eradicate this practice we often make them think critically which is important.”

There was another view on the teachers’ part which says: “Critical thinking enhances the political thinking in a student. A student gets to know what is going around in society. Also, in my opinion, Critical thinking enhances the basic ability to think of a person. And if the critical thinking of a person in a society is sharp, he could solve the social, economic as well as political matters of the country. And also, it helps a person at an individual level as well as it leads a person towards self-actualization.”

These perceptions of the teacher indicate the significance of Critical thinking in the education of the country. It is indeed an important fact as critical thinking works at different levels. From individual to societal levels, it has a role to play.

#### **4.2. The Practice of Rote-Learning: A Problem**

Without any doubt, rote learning is one of the major concerns in the education system of the country. The system is devised in such a way that the students feel pressure for appearing in their assessments and exams. They want to gain maximum weight and therefore follow the technique of book cramming and rote learning. It has been shown in Figure 04 that the majority percentage of the students admit the use of this practice. They consider it to be far more common than the practice of critical thinking.

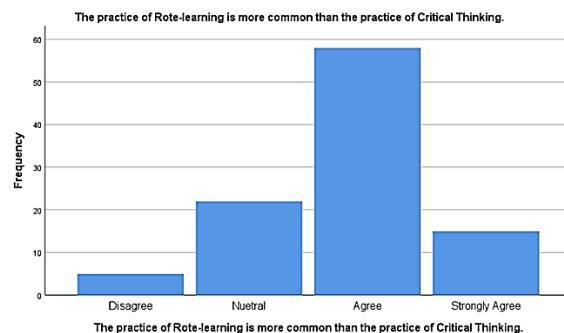
The teacher's response in this particular method also reflects the gravity of the matter. All the teachers agreed that rote learning is a common practice. However, they also devised a plan in which they think that they could tackle the problems. And most of them are breaking educational stereotypes by introducing creative methodologies (Discussions and Quizzes) at the classroom level.

"A student should be asked opinionated questions. Also, if a teacher is giving a lecture of 45 minutes, she should reduce her lecture time to 30 minutes and should keep 15 minutes for discussion. And it would be far better if she discusses current affairs and newspaper affairs during this time" One of the teachers responded.

Also, another teacher says, "I believe in constructive learning, and by that, I mean there should be a discussion method rather than a lecture method. There is more space for the students to learn in this way. First, they won't get bored and secondly, they will be actively

participating in the discussions which will help them to learn".

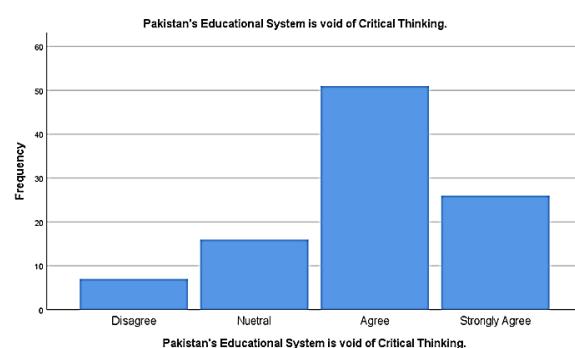
The teacher's perspective suggests the way in the right direction. There is a need to negate fall practices like rote learning and positive learning should be enacted at all levels (Fig. 4).



**Fig. 4. Practice of Rote-learning**

#### **4.3. Addressing the Elephant in Room**

As could be observed in the figures below Critical Thinking is not a strategic part of our educational system as the majority stands with the perception that our educational system is void of critical thinking. There are several reasons for that, these reasons are discussed below in Fig. 5.



**Fig. 5. Pakistan's Education System**

It is a known fact that when the Britishers came, they came for their economic progress rather than for the betterment of the natives. They built

their kind of system to facilitate their motives (Qayyum et al, 1815). They introduce an education system in 1835 and made English a mandatory part of the system in the country predominated by non-native speakers. English was the language alien to the majority of the people at that time. This education system programmed by forced learning has ripple effects in the centuries to come. Britishers made their style of education compulsory to get jobs at the governmental level (Qayyum et al, 1815). This trend is common nowadays as well. The jobs a person seeks have a set of conditions to meet. A particular design is followed which is fed by efficiency in language skills rather than creative skills. This is the reason that the education system in the country is void of Critical thinking.

There is another reason for it as well. This reason is related to the curriculum design and the authoritative system which forces a teacher to follow the particular system even though she wants the other way around.

“A teacher is bound by the limitations that are set by the authorities. This is what it is.”

Signaling the practice of the traditional style of learning. “A teacher does not have much time. We have to prepare our students for the annual examination.

Therefore, we are bound to follow the traditional practices in education. Also, a student is practicing studying in a particular manner from the time he has first been to school. It is his childhood practice. Anything

related to critical thinking adds nothing but extra pressure on him.”

The response of another teacher was: “Unfortunately, this is the way a system is designed. I will blame the system; The teachers and the students are not to be blamed for this.”

#### **4.4. Consequences**

Rote-learning and cramming have eaten the brains of the students. 60% of the students agree and 22% strongly emphasize the statement that rote learning is indeed consuming the education system of our country. The figures could be seen in Fig. 6. The result of it is drastic. When asked by a teacher in the interview, she said:

“You see, how a troublesome practice is a research for our students. They are never really into doing research work. And the reason is obvious. They are never trained to do it in their life. They are always asked to learn by heart and cram the knowledge. And consequently, they don’t know how to deal with the creative work”.

#### **4.5. Practice is Important**

Students as well as teachers agree that the practice of critical thinking is important. It is important because knowledge without its understanding is useless. And only the practice of critical thinking will allow the students to grasp the knowledge fully and completely. The results of the survey in this context are as follows and could be seen in Fig. 7.

#### **4.6. Role of the Teacher**

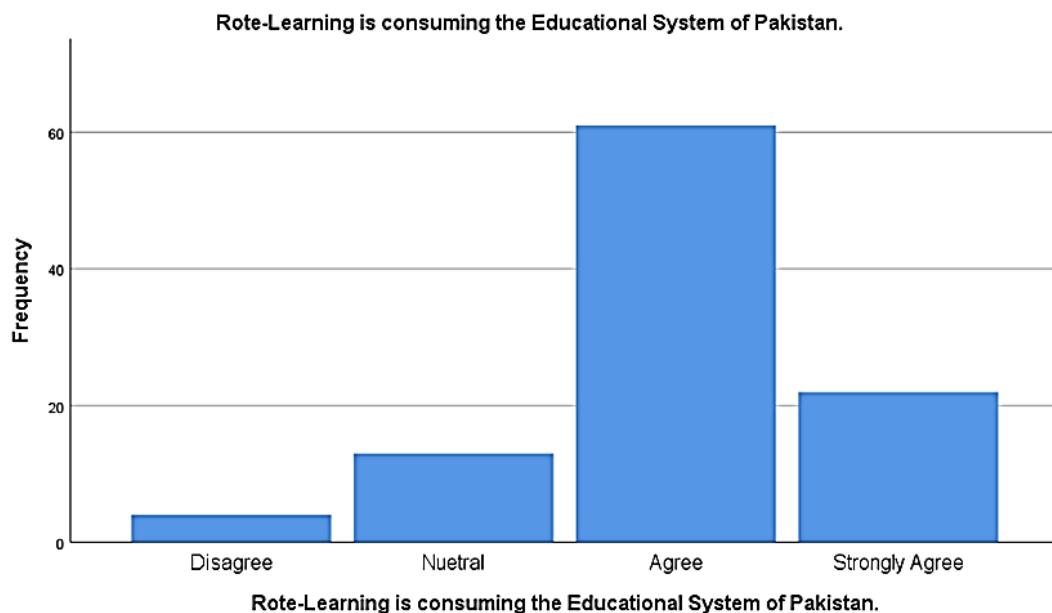
A teacher holds a significant place in the education setup of any country. Her role in any

circumstances could not be negated. It is the teacher, who inspires, motivates, and provides a platform where students learn and educate themselves. When asked about the role of the teacher from teacher, a reply came from Respondent 04.

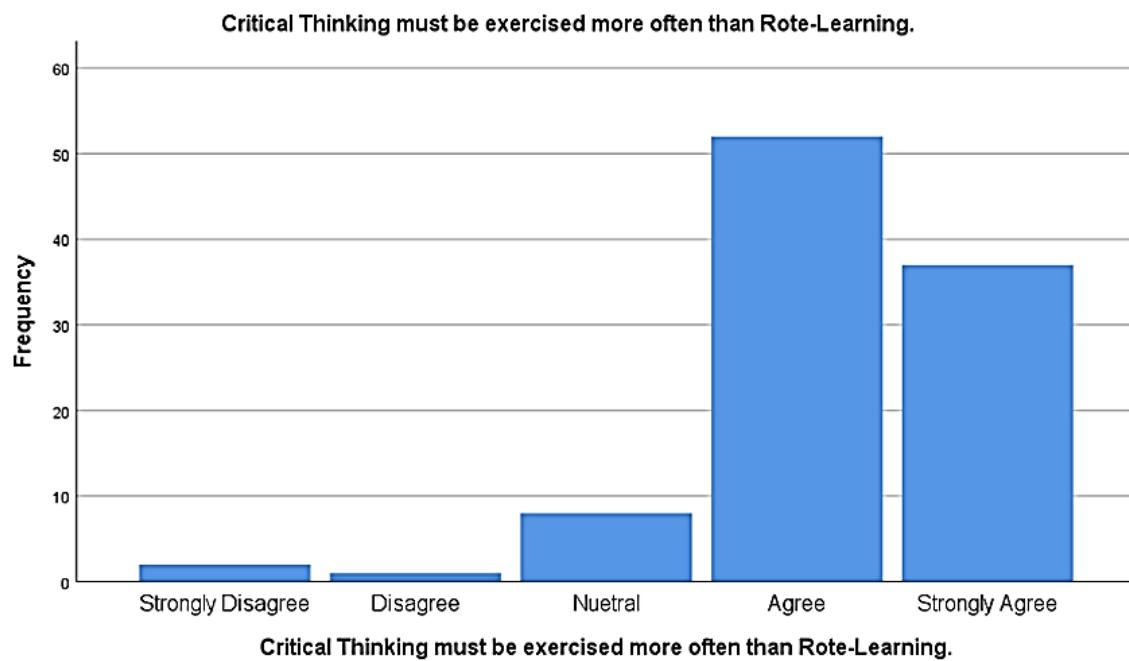
“A teacher is an initiator. The classroom is her territory, so despite the pressures from the authorities or the system, a teacher can make a change sitting inside the domains of a classroom because here, she could act beyond the

limitations set by the authorities. So, a teacher needs to understand her role and she should pay heed to the strategies with which she could make a change, even at a smaller scale.”

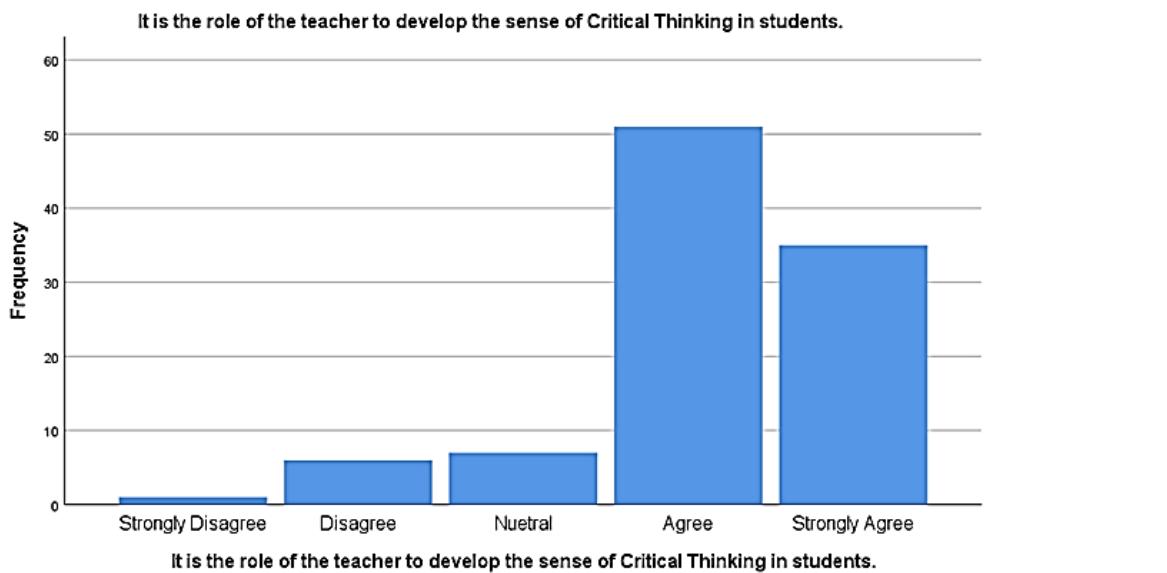
Regarding the role of the teacher, another teacher opines: “She can always correct the student. She could tell them where they are not right. It is the role of a teacher. She assesses and gives feedback”. Also, the students realize that the role of a teacher is important. It can be seen from Fig. 08.



**Fig. 6. Rote-Leaning in Educational Institutes**



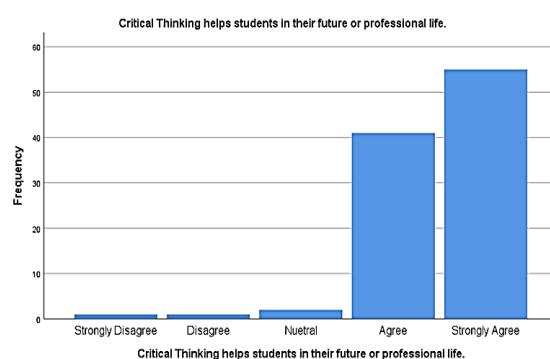
**Fig. 7. Critical Thinking Must be Exercised**



**Fig. 8. Role of Teacher in Developing Critical Thinking**

#### **4.7. Future Life**

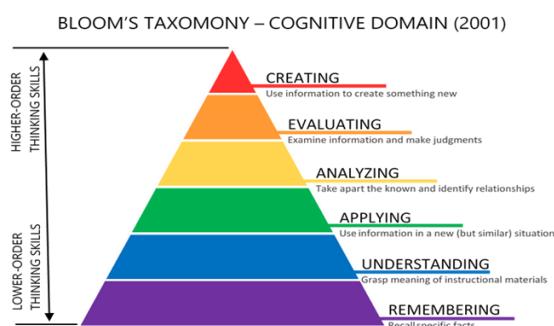
When asked in a questionnaire whether the critical ability is of any good when it comes to the professional and the future life of the student, the majority strongly agrees. They think that critical thinking certainly aids the student in the long run. The results could be seen in Fig. 9.



**Fig. 9. Critical Thinking in Professional Life**

This point is as important in the teacher's view as well. When asked, respondent 03 replies. "A critical thinker will be mindful of the realities of life. When he enters the practical life, he will know how to translate his education into practical use." She further adds, "A critical thinker will always know how to apply the knowledge. You know the levels of Bloom Taxonomy; we are stuck at level one and never move from that position. however, it is certainly important to further the knowledge. A knowledge when is practically learned will be remembered forever and it will help in the future."

The teacher was elaborate in discussing this concept. Bloom's taxonomy sure does help a student to expand their knowledge. As reflected in Fig. 10, prescribed by Bloom (1956) himself.



**Fig. 10. Blooms Taxonomy – Cognitive Domain**

Not only Remembering is required, but also understanding is important as are evaluation and creation. So, it has been understood that critical thinking is vital in the discourse of education. Without it, the system is strayed. In the words of Freire (1970), Critical thinking must be promoted so that the shackles of oppression

must be fully eradicated and the true realities of the world must be exposed.

**5. Research Findings**

According to the findings of this investigation, it has been established by the author that critical thinking is important to understand the general realities of the world. To seek political, social, and economic awareness, one must make use of the knowledge he has. Critical thinking is crucial in this context. It sets the platform where the learner can think and practically implement the knowledge. Also, the pedagogy of Pakistan requires the need of Critical thinking in its system. It will not only liberate students but will also ease the pressure on teachers. When students will be able to think and discuss in class, it will not only give them confidence but will also help them to listen and debate which will eventually be helpful to them in the long run.

**6. Conclusion**

A learner's ability to think critically is always vital for him. It doesn't only make him aware but also increases his knowledge and boosts his confidence. This research has focused on Critical thinking in Pakistani education. It has been studied that, although the country's education follows the traditional path of education and learning it strives for modern ways well. It looks to incorporate the technique of critical thinking at the classroom level so that it might help the student and improves the quality of education in the country. Freire (1970) has focused on critical pedagogy in his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and taking

help from his framework, it has been observed that to enhance the true knowledge of the students, it is important to implement the modes of critical thinking.

## **7. Future Recommendations**

This study will help to see and understand education in Pakistan. It has been observed in the current study that there is a practice of traditional methods when it comes to imparting knowledge at the institutional level. So, there is a space for future researchers to explore the dimensions of traditional education in Pakistan. They could see and research the ways to counter the traditionalist methods. Moreover, Critical thinking could be explored and studied furthermore. There are areas when it could be seen how critical thinking can aid the general understanding of the learner and how it could help them to apply the knowledge.

## **Appendix A**

### Questionnaire Queries

1. Name
2. Qualification
3. Critical thinking important in the educational system of Pakistan
4. The practice of critical thinking is appreciated by the teachers in class.
5. The practice of rote learning is more common than the practice of critical thinking in the institutions of Pakistan.
6. Pakistan's Educational system is void of critical thinking

7. Rote-learning is consuming the minds of the students.
8. The exercise of rote learning in Pakistan is due to the colonial mindset.
9. Critical thinking must be exercised rather than rote learning.
10. Critical thinking promotes creativity.
11. It is the role of the teacher to develop a sense of critical thinking in students.
12. General Reading incites the ability to Critical Thinking.
13. Critical thinking must be incorporated in students right from the Primary level.
14. Critical thinking helps students in their professional or future life.

## *Appendix B*

The questions which are asked by the teachers in the interview are complementing the questions which were asked by the students in the interview. The respondents of the interview belonged to the public sector universities of Multan. The following questions were asked of them in the interview.

1. Why Critical Thinking is Important
2. Do you think Critical Thinking helps the student in long run?
3. How Often do Students rely on the Material provided to them by the teacher?
4. Do Students follow the practices of rote learning and cramming in class?

5. How critical thinking could be imparted to the students by the teachers?
6. How teacher counters the practices of rote learning and cramming?
7. What is the role of a teacher in the context of imparting true knowledge to students?

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