

Effects of Implementing Critical Thinking on Improving Student Performance and Productivity in 9- Year Schools in the Gjakova Region

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Abstract

In this research paper object of treatment and analysis we have the results of the implementation of techniques and strategies of the critical thinking program in order to increase the learning outcomes of students. Kosovo in the reform of its education system is implementing the constructive philosophy and active teaching strategies of this program which creates a suitable learning environment. Many schools in our country have started and to some extent have stabilized in the implementation of this new philosophy and mentality in education which also favors the increase of teaching efficiency and productivity in our schools. On the other hand, many other schools have not yet begun the path reform and consequently their pedagogical daily life has remained traditional and with elements of formalism and teaching verbalism.

In this research, we specifically collected data from 21 schools in the Gjakova region which is one of the seven regions of Kosovo. This data are opinions of students and teachers. These opinions which we present as research findings are collected from school environments which apply critical thinking teaching techniques and from school environments which have not yet started their implementation. The paper consist of theoretical treatment and comparative analysis of findings from these two school environments which we have processed with the computer program SPSS and presented with different tables and graphs. Theoretical treatment and research findings emphasize Theoretical treatment and research findings emphasize Theoretical treatment and research findings emphasize the importance of critical thinking philosophy for the development of critical thinking and students' creative abilities.

Keywords: contemporary teaching, interactive learning, productive schools, learning outcomes, students' performance.

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Entry

Preparing students with critical and creative skills and independent learning habits is already an imperative of the contemporary school. Up to now, the schools of our country have been intellectual schools overloaded with unimportant and useless information for the formation and development of students. As a result, these schools have always faced low educational results. With circumstances which have dictated monotony and inadequate learning environment and with poor quality preparation of students for life and further education. Students were the object of learning, forced to memorize data and information which did not help in the development of their finding abilities and creative thinking. With the beginning of the reforms in our education system, changed the objectives for the formation of new generations with qualities required by the rapid socio-economic by the rapid socio-economic by the rapid socio-economic and technological changes has changed too.

In this context, the critical thinking program as a successful alternative to the reform of the Educational System of Kosovo has made an important contribution to improving many aspects of pedagogical practice in our schools. Training critical thinking teachers has changed their view and pedagogical practice for students and the need to include the thinking process in learning. With the use of new teaching methodology strategies, students are now more active and involved during the lesson. They better understand the learning content by discussing concrete topics, giving their opinions and defending different attitudes and behaviors that are chosen for class discussion. They are often put in the situations and tasks, by their teachers, where the choice of which requires their critical and creative thinking. In this way we say that students through the contemporary philosophy of education are active and conscious contributors in enhancing their performance and in educating their critical and creative qualities. They are encouraged in the classroom through questions and other active and contemporary teaching techniques to acquire the teaching content by analyzing and comparing numerous data and contemporary teaching techniques to acquire the teaching content by analyzing and comparing numerous data and information. The philosophy of education that follows the critical thinking has made our schools more serious and credible educational institutions. The students of these schools have already created the tradition and culture of dealing with problems and learning requirements in order to actively and interactively acquire knowledge and learning experiences. This important approach to the development of critical thinking and the original attitudes and individualities of students will be the subject of analysis and discussion in this scientific paper. The constructive theoretical approach of this research is followed and supported by the opinions of students and their teachers.

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Purpose and objectives of the research

The main purpose of this paper is to investigate the effects of implementing critical thinking on increasing students' performance and productivity of 9-year schools in the Gjakova Region. While as special objectives of this research emerge:

- To explore the role of implementing teaching techniques and strategies with a constructive and progressive approach in order to actively and interactively learn and in order to confront students with the learning tasks and requirements of the school.
- To emphasize the importance of contemporary teaching for the formation of suitable learning environment which cultivates independent learning and the development of students' intellectual skills in schools that work according to this strategy.

Research question and research methodology

The research questions of this research paper are:

- Do critical thinking teaching strategies as a new educational approach in our schools help independent learning and enhance student learning outcomes?
- What are some of the other positive influences of contemporary teaching on cultivating independent thinking and productive quality learning skills?

The contemporary approach of critical thinking as a professional innovation of teachers in order to develop critical and creative thinking of students, in this paper we initially addressed the theoretical aspect. From this point of view we have emphasized the didactic-methodological advantages of this strategy for the qualitative increase of many aspects of teaching. These pedagogical improvements enable the initiation of students' free thought and their confrontation with learning tasks which require and develop their creative skills. In this paper we have emphasized the importance of this teaching approach for mobilizing students in the active and critical acquisition of learning content. For a more complete treatment and enlightenment of this topic, we have conducted research in schools. Through standardized tests we have obtained the opinions of students and teachers from school environments that apply the philosophy of contemporary teaching. For the development of their critical and creative thinking we have also received the opinions of students and their teachers from school environments that still work mainly according to traditional approaches and strategies. We present these opinions in the paper as comparative findings through various tables and graphs. For this research project we surveyed 234 teachers and 517 students from different areas of the three municipalities where we conducted the research. We have also researched the effects of the Critical Thinking training program on the learning outcomes of students in the 9-year

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schools of this region through school documentation. Through this documentation we will analyze and compare the learning outcomes of 9th grade students from 10 schools that study according to the Critical Thinking training program with the learning outcomes of 9th grade students from 10 other schools that work according to traditional teaching. It is worth mentioning that the Achievement Test is a state that is organized for ninth grade students, after completing 9 years of schooling. However, the reliability of this test of students' knowledge is limited, as it is suspected that during the test are made abuses and manipulations. So through the school documentation will be analyzed the learning success of 1172 students from the 3 municipalities of this region of Kosovo.

Training program “Critical Thinking” as a reform project in 9-year schools of Gjakova Region

Reforming the educational system means improving all dimensions of pedagogical practice in our schools. Through this reform process we aim to implement theoretical innovations and positive practices from advanced and democratic education systems. However, this process of transformation of educational values is not an easy process that is consolidated in a short period of time. As such, this change of goals, objectives and our entire daily pedagogical practice requires first a thorough study and analysis of world trends in the field of education. These global trends and educational innovations must then be adapted to our positive tradition, the needs and our national goals for educating generations with creative and critical qualities in society and in their workplace. Therefore, we say that educational reform is closely related to democratic changes and our socio-economic transition.

After the last war in Kosovo, on behalf of reforming our schools, many educational projects and programs were launched and tested. They were often transferred to our schools without prior analysis and without sufficient study of their adaptation and connection with the experiences and tradition of our schools. Many training programs and projects were accredited by the Ministry of Education Science and Technology to implement these innovations in our educational system.

The analysis of objectives, teaching strategies and trainings of these programs shows that many of these programs are similar and sometimes even confused and contradictory with each other. It follows that the governing bodies of Kosovo education did not have a clear orientation and proper planning for the reform of the education system. The lack of long-term planning, based on the study of contemporary educational trends and our educational needs and orientations has led to delays and drags in the path of reform. The bad planning for changes reforms in education was considered by the Canadian theorist, Michael Fullan, as failure planning. In these circumstances, the training program Critical Thinking is being implemented in Kosovo and specifically in the 9-year schools of the Gjakova Region. The implementation of this program in the region we are researching is being expanded in accordance with the possibilities and concrete specifics of schools. In schools where teachers have been informed and created

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awareness of the need for positive change, they have also been mobilized to improve their educational practice. In these school environments, the word of debate has been opened inside and outside the school for the progressive changes that are taking place to increase the quality of teaching and the learning outcomes of students. The content and meaning of these changes are already being understood by students, parents and the school community. The topic of contemporary teaching strategies and techniques in these schools has already become part of the standard vocabulary of formal and collegial communications between teachers and school governing bodies. Achievements in the implementation of the training program “Critical Thinking” in these schools have given a host of positive effects and have changed their physiognomy. Students in these schools’ environments feel better and more relaxed during school hours. In these circumstances, human relations within the school have been democratized and the spirit of freedom and cooperation between students and their teachers is felt.

Students now ask much easier and more often during the lesson, take the floor for discussion and initiative in other learning activities. The teachers of these schools are collaborating with students and encouraging and guiding them in interactive activities and active learning. “Therefore, the teacher in his work, going beyond the traditional forms of teaching, becomes: supervisor, planner, consultant, instructor, specialist for teaching content, scenographer, author in the realization of content, corrective, concurrent in solving and developing problems etc.” (Njazi Zylfiu, 2005:164). There are some tableaus that we found during the research in some schools of the Gjakova Region, which have already created a positive tradition and a success story in the way of implementing Critical Thinking. These urban and rural schools have become a model of change and a point of reference for other schools in this region, which are lagging behind on the path of reform. We have also noticed that these schools are respected by their communities, the Municipal Directorates of Education and other schools in the district. They are appreciated for the quality and seriousness in the teaching work and for the creation of school environments where teaching is done with enthusiasm and dedication. On the other hand, the largest number of 9-year schools in this region, some are closer and are farther, stand behind the above-mentioned schools in the implementation of the Critical Thinking training program. In these schools, principals and teachers are not sufficiently informed about the philosophy of the new teaching methodology. They continue their daily educational work as isolated and uninfluenced by the changes of new educational practices that are taking place in many schools of their district. In these school environments, unfortunately, there are school and teachers who do not distinguish the essence of educational change and the contemporary approach to the upbringing and educational of children. Especially principals without professional training and competence, who were brought to these position in our post-war socio-political case and circumstances, have become an obstacle to the reform and modernization of their schools.

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So, due to poor professional preparation and lack of quality training, these principals and teachers of these schools have dilemmas and mistakes in their pedagogical practice. For the same reasons, they oppose the application of Critical Thinking teaching techniques. Their work and interpersonal relationships in these schools are largely traditional and bureaucratic. Teaching is dominated by lecturing, unprofessional tact and spontaneity of teachers. In their work, they are isolated and uncooperative with each other and with their students. These teachers are very little informed about the teaching methods that their fellow teachers use during the lesson. The teaching class of these teachers is almost monotonous and with small educational effects. Whereas as a result, students' learning is superficial and formal with tendencies of compulsion for mechanical learning. In these schools there are also qualitative teachers with professional competence. But they do not have the power to influence positive changes at the school level. Majority of traditional teachers, in still traditional schools, tend to isolate and silence the voices and initiatives of innovative teachers, for positive changes. Between these two polarities there are also schools that are making efforts to implement new teaching techniques in their teaching. These schools with orientations for the implementation of pedagogical innovations are interested in training of teaching staff and at the same time their interest is seen in cooperation with other schools for assistance and guidance in the implementation of new teaching techniques and strategies. In the staff of these schools we find the right orientation, harmony and readiness of teachers for professional cooperation in the way of fulfilling the social mission of the school. In general, we can say that the 9-year schools of the Gjakova Region are moving with steps and individual opportunities of schools towards the increasingly qualitative implementation of contemporary objectives and strategies of Critical Thinking.

Effects of implementing Critical Thinking on improving Students' performance and Productivity in 9-year Schools in the Gjakova Region

The main hypothesis of this research is that the schools that work according to the Critical Thinking training program, compared to the traditional schools, organize more active and interactive learning. As a result of this improvement, among other things, is the increase of students' learning outcomes. During the theoretical treatment, but also through our findings, we are proving to some extent this theoretical assumption. From the presentation of the research findings there are differences between the opinions of teachers and students from these two school environments that we are analyzing. However consistently for specific aspects of educational practice the findings show some slight differences, and some more distinct one. These differences in our opinion are real and representative of the different realities in our schools. We defend the position that in schools where this philosophy of teaching is applied with high quality, the differences and teaching qualities are higher and more visible.

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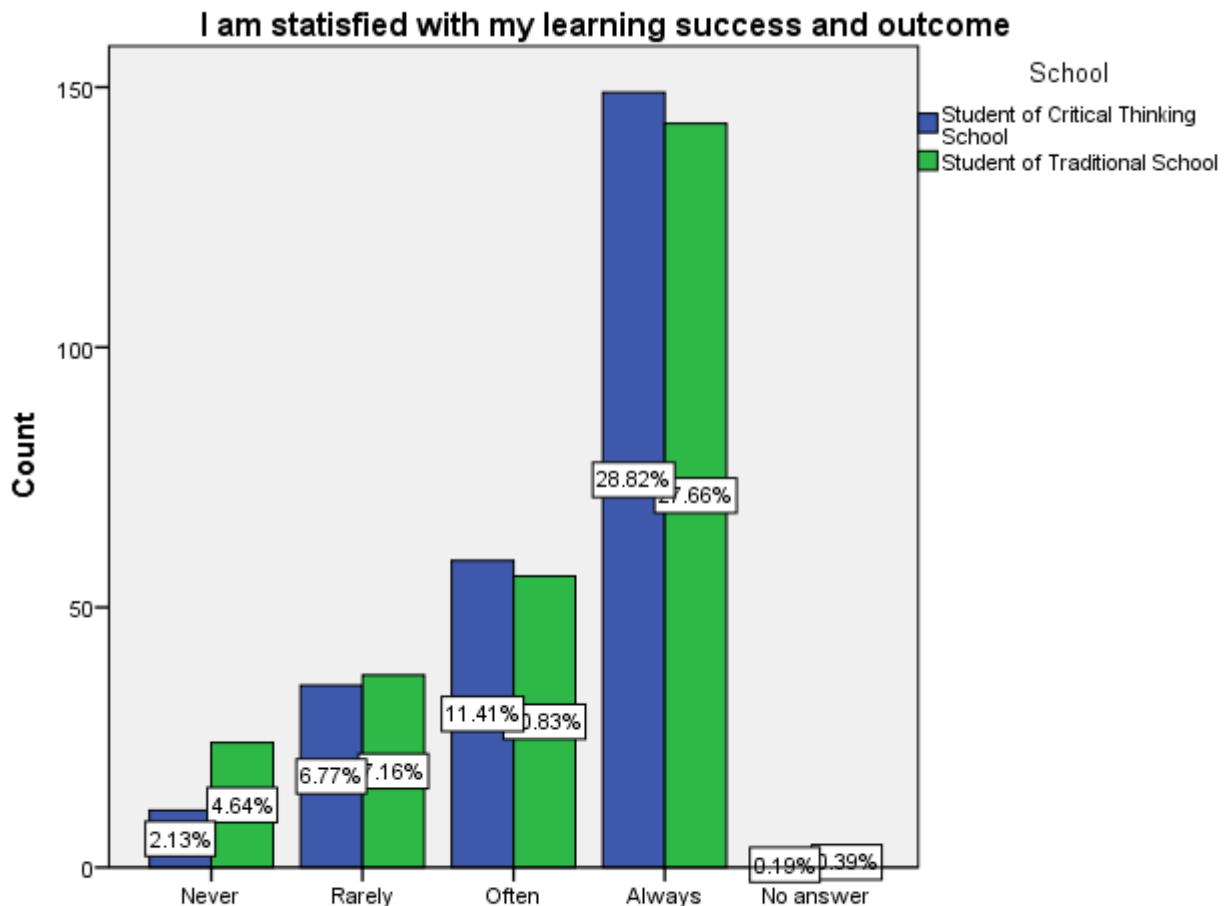
On the other hand, when schools apply Critical Thinking partly and with lower quality, then the teaching improvements are not sufficiently noticeable and tangible. We asked for the opinions the students themselves about the effects of the implementation of the Critical Thinking training program on the students' learning outcomes. We asked them how satisfied they are with their learning outcomes and their opinions expressed in percentage, are:

Table 1

I am satisfied with my learning success and outcome		School		Total
		Student of CT School	Student of Traditional School	
Never	Number	11	24	35
	%	2.1%	4.6%	6.8%
Rarely	Number	35	37	72
	%	6.8%	14.1%	13.9%
Often	Number	59	56	115
	%	23.1%	21.4%	22.2%
Always	Number	149	143	292
	%	58.4%	54.6%	56.5%
No answer	Number	1	2	3
	%	0.4%	0.8%	0.6%
Total	Number	255	262	517
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

This table demonstrates the differences between the opinions of students from the Critical Thinking schools and the traditional ones. Students in contemporary schools are more satisfied with their learning outcomes. They have lower percentages for the first two options, which express disagreement with the statement provided for the declaration, and higher percentages for the other two options, which approve the above statement at different levels. This proves that their result of teaching that applies new teaching techniques and strategies are significantly higher compared to their peers from traditional schools. The very positive opinions of students about their learning outcomes are indicators of the quality of teaching and the school environment that stimulates the achievement of learning success. The tabular data in the graph, look like:

Figure 1



The graph above explains even better the differences in students' opinions. The opinions of students from traditional schools are slightly poorer about their learning success. They have expressed greater disagreement and lower compliance with the above statement, compared to students of Critical Thinking schools. The very low degree of compliance with learning outcomes indicates that this outcome does not match their skill and expectations. We also asked the teachers about aspects of learning outcomes and student performance. We asked them to state the statement: students make presentations in front of the class. Presenting and referring students is an important learning activity and feature of contemporary teaching. They present to their peers individual and group learning tasks and results, which are followed by discussions and learning debates. The teachers' opinions on this statement are:

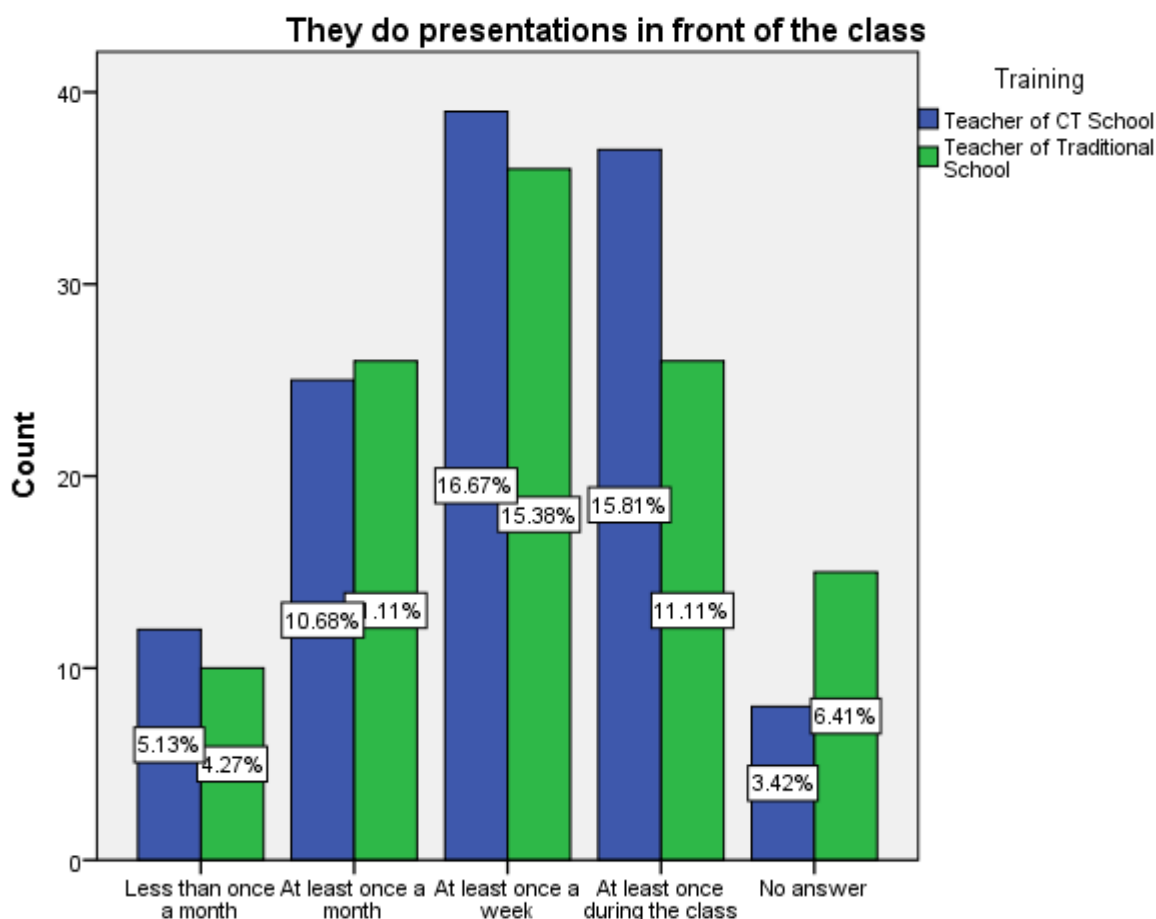
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Table 2

They do presentations in front of the class		Training		Total
		Teacher of CT School	Teacher of Traditional School	
Less than once a month	Number	12	10	22
	%	9.9%	8.8%	9.4%
At least once a month	Number	25	26	51
	%	20.7%	23.0%	21.8%
At least once a week	Number	39	36	75
	%	32.2%	31.9%	32.1%
At least once during the class	Number	37	26	63
	%	30.6%	23.0%	26.9%
No answer	Number	8	15	23
	%	6.6%	13.3%	9.8%
Total	Number	121	113	234
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The percentages of teachers' opinions from the two school environments that we have the object of analysis and comparison are distributed in four variants. There are differences between the teachers of these two school environments in terms of the frequency of presenting their students in front of the class. Teachers of Critical Thinking schools have stated that their students present works and teaching assignments more often in front of the class. These tabular findings expressed as percentages in the graph, look as follows:

Figure 2



Unlike Critical Thinking teachers, those in traditional schools are less likely to organize presentations in front of their students, which means that they also find group and collaborative work less applicable. These findings on the premises and aspects of teaching practice in schools prove that between these school environments there are differences in the approach to students and the learning process. Schools that are paving the way for reform through the application of new teaching techniques, are increasingly engaging their students in the active acquisition of knowledge and learning experiences. The teachers of these schools are becoming partners to students in the path of their intellectual formation. Whereas, the findings from the traditional schools show that their students and teachers are not close enough and cooperative in their preparation for efficient and independent learning.

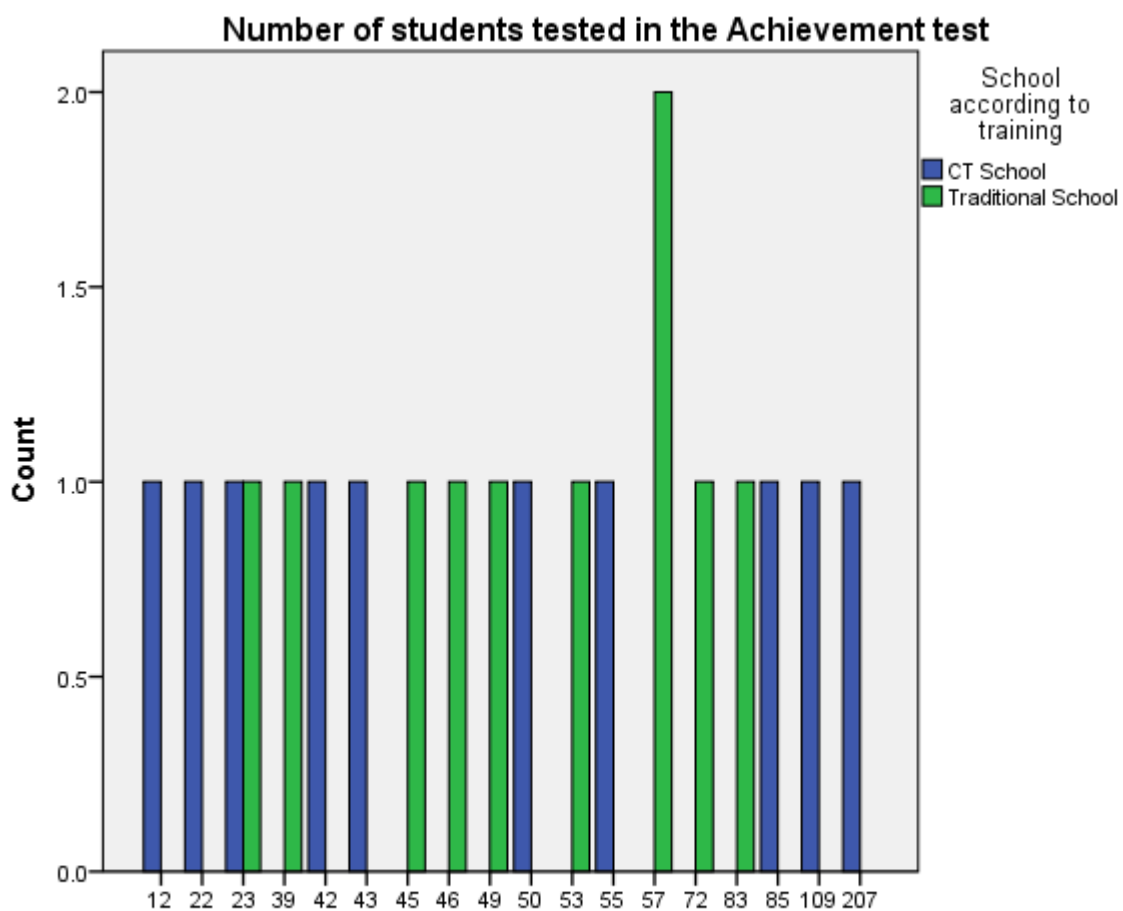
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To confirm the hypothesis of this research we analyzed the learning outcomes of 1.172 students achieved in the National Achievement Test. The results of this test were divided and analyzed into two comparative groups. The first group of students consists of 648 students from 10 schools of Critical Thinking. Whereas, the second group consists of 524 students from 10 other schools that still develop the educational process according to traditional teaching approaches and strategies.

Figure 3



The results of the 9th grade students in the Achievement Test, analyzed for the 20 schools of the three municipalities where we conducted the research and expressed in percentage, are as follows:

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Table 3

The results of the achievement test 2015 for Critical Thinking Schools and for Traditional Schools	No. of Schools	Possible points from the total of school subjects	Scored points from the total of school subjects	Percentage of points scored and the total of the school subjects	
School of Critical Thinking	1	1	20700	14729	71.11
	2	2	2200	1585	72.04
	3	3	1200	794	66.15
	4	4	8500	4614	54.28
	5	5	2300	1387	60.30
	6	6	5500	3237	58.85
	7	7	5000	2444	48.88
	8	8	10900	7862	72.13
	9	9	4200	2836	67.52
	10	10	4300	3234	75.20
N	10	10	10	10	
Mean		6480.00	4272.20	64.64	
Traditional School	1	11	5700	3564	62.52
	2	12	2300	1615	70.21
	3	13	5300	2434	45.92
	4	14	8300	3978	47.92
	5	15	5700	3096	54.31
	6	16	7200	3982	55.30
	7	17	4900	3373	68.83
	8	18	4500	2913	64.73
	9	19	4600	3010	65.43
	10	20	3900	1017	26.07
N	10	10	10	10	
Mean		5240.00	2898.20	56.1240	

These are the overall results of the students achieved in the Achievement Test for the nine subjects that were in the test. We have grouped the individual school results into Critical Thinking and traditional schools. The differences are noticeable if we look at the success averages for both groups of schools. Students of Critical Thinking schools have achieved

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higher scores in the state test for 9th grade. Differences in result averages 64.64%-56.12% are pretty emphasizing and significant.

We also notice significant differences between these two groups of schools even if we look for their highest and lowest scores. The highest scores for Critical Thinking schools are 75.20% and for traditional schools 70.21%. So in overall success the higher scores of contemporary schools are significantly higher than the higher scores of traditional schools. While, even deeper are the differences in the lower scores of these two school environments. As it can be seen, for the schools of Critical Thinking are 48.88% and for those schools that have not yet started the application of methodological innovations in their educational process are 26.07%. The above table contains the overall success of students from the nine subjects tested. These changes in students' success demonstrate the superiority of contemporary teaching, which applies learning approaches and strategies, which create a suitable learning environment and activate students in the active and logical acquisition of knowledge. Whereas, the results of these students in the Achievement Test for particular subjects for these two school environments, are as in the following table:

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Table 4

% A T according to the school subjects	% Albanian	% English	% History	% Geography	% Maths	% I T	% Physics	% Chemistry	% Biology	
S C T	1	75.60	91.88	69.00	81.11	73.79	75.74	54.32	60.20	70.71
	2	65.68	89.09	64.68	73.10	73.63	59.00	56.56	66.47	81.81
	3	66.25	98.33	73.71	59.02	69.58	58.33	68.51	48.95	55.20
	4	55.05	72.94	52.66	41.37	39.58	73.64	66.27	55.73	72.35
	5	50.00	88.69	68.89	61.95	55.21	89.56	52.17	45.10	70.65
	6	68.27	84.36	62.37	50.75	56.63	63.27	49.69	43.18	47.04
	7	60.30	73.20	38.00	39.16	43.20	65.20	46.88	47.25	44.75
	8	67.43	97.06	68.31	80.81	78.53	69.17	75.94	54.70	60.43
	9	66.07	80.00	73.99	76.38	67.97	87.14	41.53	71.13	51.78
	10	88.77	87.90	80.50	62.79	73.25	81.86	77.00	77.61	40.69
Mean	66.34	86.34	65.21	62.64	63.13	72.29	58.88	57.03	59.54	
T S	1	59.29	89.82	71.12	59.35	60.00	84.56	40.54	54.16	67.98
	2	77.82	87.82	42.80	44.56	79.13	93.91	60.86	84.23	82.60
	3	52.54	74.33	43.25	46.22	36.13	65.28	37.94	41.98	38.44
	4	55.06	73.97	48.93	46.48	77.35	66.02	38.01	33.13	43.63
	5	65.17	71.92	45.61	58.47	52.10	56.49	47.36	40.35	50.00
	6	60.83	70.83	49.78	50.69	48.68	73.33	44.59	57.29	63.02
	7	61.22	98.77	92.30	56.63	67.34	82.44	52.15	63.77	68.36
	8	51.77	98.66	70.42	52.40	71.44	97.33	56.29	51.11	71.11
	9	47.28	83.04	50.50	87.31	78.15	51.73	68.11	59.78	70.65
	10	29.10	38.97	33.92	31.41	19.87	31.28	15.66	13.78	25.96
Mean	56.00	78.81	54.86	53.35	59.01	70.23	46.15	49.95	58.17	

Findings on students' success in particular subjects also show that schools that work according to Critical Thinking strategies and techniques are more effective. The average percentages for the two school groups are distinct and meaningful. These averages for all school subjects tested are higher in the group of schools we are calling more contemporary, compared to schools that are reluctant to face the methodological innovations of the time. These changes and successes in results are a product and a reflection of improvements in general school practice. Thus, the improvement of aspects and other educational influences produce positive impacts and effects on the academic success of students and on their better preparation for work and independent life. Remember that the learning outcomes of the students that we analyzed are exactly those schools, in which we also received the opinions of students and teachers through our survey. In our opinion, the percentages of the opinions of teachers and students are matching the percentages of their

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learning success that they have achieved in the Achievement Test. The levels of differences between the opinions of teachers and students and the educational success between the two school environments that we are comparing also seem to be harmonized. As a conclusion of this treatment point we can emphasize that in the success of students and in the productivity of our schools there are significant changes. The schools of our research region that have started the path of positive change, applying new teaching techniques and approaches, are creating a history success. They are an example of creating an appropriate learning environment that creates partnerships between educational factors in order to fulfill their mission. On the other hand, schools that continue to work according to outdated educational strategies and mentality are widening their gap with today's socio-economic circumstances and with the educational trends of the time.

Conclusions and recommendations

As conclusions of this research we can issue:

- Teachers though this new philosophical approach have contributed more than their colleagues from traditional schools in the development and independent and critical thinking of students and in cultivating their various creative talents and abilities.
- From the theoretical treatment of this paper we find that schools apply the methodology of teaching critical thinking have mobilized students in the active acquisition of knowledge by discussing and analyzing information and views from various aspects.
- These schools encourage their students to the development of their personality as individuals with initiative and intellectual habits and are at the same time preparing them for productive and independent learning throughout their lives.
- The Municipal Directorates of Education and the Ministry of education are also making important contributions to teachers' training, coordinating multilateral efforts to improve the pedagogical practices of our schools.

While the recommendations of this research are:

- Teachers in their daily pedagogical work through the contemporary teaching methodology to become partners and instructors to their students in the way of their best preparation for quality education throughout life.
- Schools that work according to the philosophy of critical thinking to continue with teachers' training on teaching strategies of this new educational approach with the aim of preparing new generations with creative qualities and sharpness of critical thinking.
- Traditional schools to collaborate with contemporary schools and mobilize their educational staff to improve many aspects of teaching which create opportunities for improving the quality of learning and their learning outcomes.

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- Municipal Directorates of Education and the Ministry of Education to provide assistance and support to our schools in reforming daily pedagogical practices with quality training and equipping them with appropriate teaching aids and technologies.

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