

Critical Thinking as Part of Internationalization of Curriculums in Higher Education

Shabnam Kabir

University of Reading, United Kingdom

Abstract

The aim of this project was to pave the way for the internationalisation of curricula. Internationalisation is not merely about recruiting international students; more importantly, it involves adjusting the curriculum to support the development of skills aligned with programme and module learning outcomes (PLOs/MLOs). In this context, the project focused on enhancing critical thinking among international students. Previous research has identified critical thinking as a significant challenge in higher education. Specifically, engaging critically with ideas—particularly when it involves questioning authority or challenging norms—is often not a pedagogical practice students have encountered before university. Data from one subject area at a UK university indicate that most international students produce assignments that primarily summarise existing literature, rather than offering critical analysis. This trend has led to weak academic work, increased plagiarism, uncritical use of generative AI, and, if unaddressed, potentially lower degree classifications. In response—drawing on previous research—three focus groups were created. These sessions incorporated structured critical thinking exercises, in-depth discussions linking theory with practice, and reflective engagement with ChatGPT-generated content. Despite being midway through their studies, students still struggled with applying critical thinking. Nevertheless, qualitative feedback was positive, with one participant stating: “You are helping us more than you can imagine.” To evaluate the intervention, the Ennis-Weir Critical Thinking Essay Test was administered, showing improved critical thinking skills after the sessions. Findings from this initiative will inform future curriculum development aimed at strengthening both critical thinking pedagogy and the broader internationalisation agenda.

Keywords: critical thinking, internationalization, curriculum developments, focus groups, programme learning outcomes