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Critical Thinking in Higher Education: Assessing Graduate Students' Argument-Evaluation and Judgement-Making Skills

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Abstract

The need for developed critical thinking (CT) skills transcends fields of study, professional specialties, and the complexities of the present-day life. Yet, the debate regarding whether intervention in higher education aiming to enhance students' CT skills ought to be explicit or implicit, focus on skills or dispositions, favor perception of CT as a general transferable skill or context-bound and domain-specific, and what micro-skills it encompasses is still ongoing. This study explores to what extent higher education institutions are successful in developing this thinking skill in an EFL context. To pursue this aim, a comparative study was carried out to evaluate CT skills among final-semester students in a bachelor's degree program at a public university in Morocco. The students' ability to evaluate arguments and make sound judgements was assessed through a reasoning fallacy identification instrument. The test was administered to 100 students at the department of English studies and 100 students at the higher school for education and training. The students' scores were analyzed and compared using statistical tests. The non-significant differences between the overall low scores of the two institutions' students reveal a stark critical thinking deficiency at the completion of a three-year higher education academic journey. These findings may have important implications in teacher professional development, syllabus design, instruction materials, and classroom practice. Practical recommendations are therefore formulated in terms of improving critical thinking instruction in tertiary education.

Keywords: Teaching Critical Thinking; Argument Evaluation; Logical Fallacies; Tertiary Education; Critical Thinking Interventions