




Research Paper

A comparative study of the role of critical thinking in education according to Allameh Tabataba'i and Habermas

Hamid Tooback¹, Ahmad Souri^{*2}, Sadegh Rezaee³

1. PhD student, Philosophy of Islamic Education, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran.
2. Corresponding Author: Associate Professor, Department of Educational Psychology, Faculty of Educational Sciences and Psychology, Amin Police Academy, Tehran, Iran.

3. Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Sciences, Faculty of Educational Sciences and Psychology, Amin Police Academy, Tehran, Iran

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Abstract

Aim: By comparing the philosophical and educational ideas of Allameh Tabataba'i and Habermas, this study explored the indicators of critical thinking and its effects on educational elements (objectives, teaching methods, curriculum, teacher's role) to offer practical educational implications. A descriptive, comparative, and qualitative content analysis approach was adopted in compliance with the research questions. A conceptual framework relying on scholars' definitions was employed for data analysis. The data were collected by taking notes on purposively selected articles and books penned by the two philosophers. Investigator triangulation, check and recheck, comparison of findings with those of similar studies, and theoretical triangulation were performed to confirm the validity and dependability of the results. Based on the findings, the components of critical thinking (questioning, discussion and debate, rationality, logical reasoning, liberal thinking, ethical education, and seeking the truth) appear in the works of both philosophers. The following educational implications resulting from their viewpoints are presented based on educational elements: reason-based and nature-based ethical education, freedom from ignorance and domination, attaining closeness to God, honesty, liberal thinking, a collaborative method based on constructive discussion, and teachers' communicative action in line with their knowledge and practice.

Keywords: *Critical thinking; educational implications; Allameh Tabataba'i; educational elements; Jürgen Habermas*

Introduction

Critical thinking has long attracted philosophers and intellectuals. In recent centuries, especially since the 20th century, critical thinking has been established based on the ideas of philosophers such as Nietzsche and continued with Heidegger (existentialist school) and Wittgenstein (analytic school) (AliPour, 2016: 5).

Islamic scholars and philosophers have also adopted a critical approach to the ideas and sociopolitical conditions of their times. The same approach existed when dealing with jurisprudential issues, leading to the important and critical phenomenon of Ijtihad among Shi'a jurists (Mir-Ahmadi & Ahmadi, 2016).

Today, education scholars have noticed the significance of novel educational methods, rational and cognitive approaches, and critical thinking in education. The interpretation and extraction of critical thinking components from Muslim scholars' ideas and adapting them to the ideas of contemporary philosophers can help localize novel educational methods for Islamic societies.

Several studies with different orientations, objectives, and requirements have examined philosophical and educational components of critical thinking, including Akhavan Malayeri, Seifi, and Faghihi's (2020) *Designing an Educational Package for Developing Critical Thinking on the Basis of the Stories and Allegories of the Holy Quran*; Khodadadi and Rezaee's (2018) *The study of the philosophical foundations of postmodernism with emphasis on Jurgen Habermas's views and educational implicit implications of this view in education*; and Marashi, Cheraghian, Safaei Moghaddam, and Valavi's (2018) *A Comparative Study of Social Thinking in Allameh Tabataba'i and Lipman's Views and its Implications for Philosophy for Children*. The current study, however, operationalized the critical thinking-related concepts in the ideas of Allameh Tabataba'i (a Muslim philosopher) and Habermas (a contemporary Western philosopher) for the educational elements of Iran.

Methodology

Descriptive-analytical, analytical-comparative, and qualitative content analysis approaches were adopted in compliance with the research objectives and questions. The first and second questions involved the identification and introduction of critical thinking indicators in the educational and philosophical ideas of Allameh Tabataba'i and Habermas. To answer these

questions, a conceptual framework was adopted from the ideas of different scholars, e.g., Facione, Glaser, Rudd and Paul, on the definition of critical thinking indicators. The concepts extracted from sample sources were assessed with this conceptual framework and introduced as the main components of critical thinking in these two philosophers' works.

The third and fourth questions dealt with the similarities and differences in the dimensions and components of critical thinking in the two philosophers' ideas, answered via the analytical-comparative method. In this method, the similarities and differences between statements and concepts are compared (Given, 2008) Qualitative content analysis was performed to answer the fifth research question, wherein the components of critical thinking extracted from the two philosophers' educational and philosophical ideas were regarded as sub-categories in the preliminary coding. In the second stage of coding, these sub-categories were classified into larger concepts, forming the educational implications of critical thinking according to Allameh Tabataba'i and Habermas. Allameh Tabataba'i's *Tafsir al-Mizan* (Vols. 1, 2, 5, 6, 13, 14, 17, 20), *The Principles of Philosophy and the Method of Realism*, *Islamic Investigations* (Vol. 1), and *Bidāyat al-hikmah*; and Habermas' *The Theory of Communicative Action*, *Jurgen Habermas: Critic in the Public Sphere*, and *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere* were purposively selected as the sample to describe and analyze their educational ideas. Investigator triangulation (Kimchi, Polivka, Stevenson, 1991), check and recheck, comparison of the findings with those of similar studies, and theoretical triangulation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) were used to confirm and promote the validity, accuracy, and dependability of the results.

Results

The components of critical thinking extracted from Allameh Tabataba'i's ideas were seeking the truth, questioning, logical reasoning, rationality, flexibility, respecting other views, lack of prejudice, comprehensive education based on honesty, ethical education, purification of the nafs, and attaining closeness to God.

The components of critical thinking in Habermas' ideas included human empowerment to know society and culture, logical reasoning, liberal thinking in communicative actions, questioning and critiquing, rationality, ethical education, flexibility and respecting other views, seeking the truth, discussion and debate in communicative actions, freedom from domination and subjugation, optimal teacher-learner communicative action, and educational materials based on a critique of the status quo. The shared components were questioning, discussion and debate, rationality and logical

reasoning, freedom and liberal thinking in criticism, flexibility and tolerance, ethical education, and seeking the truth.

Table 1: Differences between Habermas and Allameh Tabataba'i in terms of critical thinking components in education

Habermas	Allameh Tabataba'i
Human empowerment to understand society	Purification of the nafs and reaching monotheism (Tohid) and closeness to God
Freedom from domination and subjugation	Freedom from ignorance
Educational materials based on a critique of the status quo	Comprehensive education based on honesty
Optimal teacher-learner communicative action	Teacher's conjoined knowledge and practice

Several educational implications based on the ideas of Allameh Tabataba'i and Habermas are presented.

Implications for educational objectives include reason-based and nature-based ethical education, freedom from ignorance and domination in social settings, and reaching monotheism and closeness to God. Educational implications for the curriculum include comprehensive educational materials based on criticism and honesty, and learners' liberal thinking in the learning process. As for teaching methods, the educational implications include constructive discussion-based collaborative methods and rationality and logical reasoning in the teaching-learning process. As for teachers' role, the educational implications are constructive discussion at the center of critical thinking education, and teachers' communication action in line with their knowledge and practice.

Discussion and conclusion

As for the first research question, the indicators and components of critical thinking in Allameh Tabataba'i's ideas extracted in this study are compatible with the results of Akhavan Malayeri et al. (2020), Marashi et al. (2018), and Karimian et al. (2016). As for the second research question, the indicators and components of critical thinking in Habermas' ideas are also consistent with the findings of Khodadadi and Rezaee (2018), Ahmadabadi et al. (2016), and Lucia and Sofia (2017). As for the third research question (similarities and differences in the ideas of these two philosophers), the findings are in line with those of Karimian et al. (2016) and Homaayoonfard and Sajjaadi (2016). As for the fourth research question (distinctions in the components of critical thinking in education between Allameh Tabataba'i and Habermas' ideas), the findings are consistent with the results of

Karimian et al. (2016). As for the fifth research question (educational implications based on the components of critical thinking in these two philosophers' ideas), the results are consistent with the findings of Khodadadi and Rezaee (2018), Marashi et al. (2018), Becirovic et al. (2019), and Changwong et al. (2018). This study was limited by the incoherence of concepts and expressions in the literature of critical thinking and the resulting explanations.

Recommendations:

- Revising the curriculum to promote learners' dynamism, creativity, and critical thinking
- Using collaborative teaching methods based on critical thinking in educational centers
- Promoting teachers' practical knowledge of critical thinking through in-service training
- Writing books and articles to foster students' critical thinking at different levels

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