

Developing an adult learning approach to enhance the critical thinking of graphic design students in Yemen

Keywords

Adult learning, critical thinking, education, graphic design, Ijtihad

Critical thinking is an essential skill not only for educational achievement but also to enhance the quality of life (Bakry et al., 2019, pp. 632-633). However, Yemen has not traditionally encouraged or utilized critical thinking in graphic design education, a field of study where critical thinking is required to think beyond a problem to create solutions to existing and new problems. Design does not come up with the same solution for each project but looks for new ideas and solutions that have culturally relevant answers to solve a problem (Barbour, 2016). Currently there is a lack of research in the areas of critical thinking in graphic design education in Yemen. To Nordin and Surajudin (2015), Ijtihad is a representative for Higher-Order Thinking Skill that may reflect the Tawhid of Allah (God's unification) and supported their claim with a hadith (the prophet statements): "Those who know himself, he may know his God" (Nordin & Surajudeen, 2015, p. 37). Thus, in knowing oneself, the lifelong learner needs to have self-regulation to be able to use critical thinking (Szabo, 2019). In exploring the relationship between the Islamic concept of Ijtihad (individual reasoning) and the Western notion of critical thinking, there are several points that require consideration. In particular, establishing what critical thinking means in the context of Western design education relative to Ijtihad's role in Islamic education.

The focus of this presentation is exploring the relationship between the western notion of critical thinking and the equivalent Islamic concept of Ijtihad. It highlights the five elements of Ijtihad: Tadabbur (learning and understanding before judging an idea), Tafkih (analysing using al-Qalb (heart) that depends on al-Aqal (mind)), Tafakkur (reflecting and examining), Ta'qil (gathering information before jumping to the conclusion), and Tadhakkur (summarising to understand wisely). Critical thinking is culturally relative, so it is important to study this phenomenon considering the Yemeni culture proposing a suitable holistic framework of Ijtihad. This research draws on a Ph.D. study in-progress that investigates critical thinking in graphic design education in Yemen from an Islamic perspective. Interviews with Yemeni educators were conducted to explore the concept of critical thinking and Ijtihad. This research ultimately aims to identify essential techniques of thinking that can be shaped to reflect Ijtihad, alongside identifying appropriate adult learning strategies developed by Western educators and researchers to enhance students' critical thinking. The outcome of this study will distinguish frameworks within graphic design curricula promoting students' critical thinking and reflecting these from a Western context to a Yemeni one considering Ijtihad.