

Teaching Critical Thinking in Post-Conflict Countries: The University of Liberia

Authors : Kamille Beye

Abstract : Critical thinking is a topic that has been disputed in the field of education for decades, but many resulting debates have centered around strengthening critical thinking capabilities in the societies, workforces, and educational centers of the global north. In contrast, this paper provides an analysis of the teaching of critical thinking in Liberia, which has been ravaged by years of war and a recent Ebola outbreak. These crises have decimated the Liberian education sector, leading to a loss of teaching capacities that are essential to providing critical thinking education. Until recently, critical thinking had no seat at the table when the future needs of the country were discussed by the government and non-governmental agencies. Now, the University of Liberia has a bold goal to become one of the top twenty universities in West Africa in the next seven years, which has led to a focus on teaching critical thinking skills to improve learning. This paper argues that critical thinking is essential to strengthening not only the Liberian education system, but for promoting peace amongst community members, and yet it suggests that commitments to the teaching of critical thinking in Liberia have hitherto been overly superficial. Based on an initial scoping study, this paper will examine the potential impacts of teaching critical thinking skills to undergraduate students in the William V. S. Tubman School of Education at the University of Liberia on continued peacebuilding and reconstruction efforts of the country. The research contends that if critical thinking skills are taught, practiced and continually utilized, teachers and students will have the ability to engage with information and negotiate challenges to solutions in ways that are beneficial to the communities in which they live. The research will use a variety of methods, that include the California Critical Thinking Disposition Inventory. This research will demonstrate that critical thinking skills are not only needed for entering the workforce, but necessary for negotiating and expressing the needs and desires of local communities in a peaceful way.

Keywords : critical thinking, higher education, Liberia, peacebuilding, post-conflict

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