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A critical approach to research – A quest for truth – The methodology used in works of Research and their merits

Author - Pranjal Kumar, Student at Jindal Global Law School, OP Jindal University

Abstract

The approach in this paper is to evaluate the idea of how critical thinking can be evaluated under the light of approaching research papers and assignments. This paper will be divided into three separate patterns of contentions – the idea of various forms of academic theories and concepts that can be applied in critical thinking and analysis, the multidimensional consideration of academic and critical thinking in rigorous application of multifaceted ideals and standards and how the idea of technical, practical, and emancipatory approach is critical in approaching the study of academic writing and critical evaluation. These approaches will be considered in light of how they help in elevating the critical approach with which analysis and evaluation of theories and the research question can be made. The ideal for reaching the truth will be kept subtle in the deliberation upon how critical theory and research can blend together. This blending of research methodology and approach shall be considered under a multi-contentious proposal in approach and develop from its various forms of applications.

Introduction

The idea of critical thinking when considering the value of research in terms of academic consideration should be given due consideration under two elements – the idea of establishing an evaluative framework and the set-up of a critical approach towards data analysis and information processing. Since the advent of the printing press, when information in relevant capacity became available at a large capacity meant that each individual could provide evaluation and analysis as may be relevant. Since the idea of rationalism, libertarianism, liberalism, modernism, post-modernism has developed through critical thinking, the comprehensive standard of approaching research became very important. Research has been described as the following under Merriam Webster – "studious inquiry or examination *especially*: investigation or experimentation aimed at the discovery and interpretation of facts, revision of accepted theories or laws in the light of new facts, or practical application of such new or revised theories or laws **:** the collecting of information about a particular subject **:** careful or diligent search"[24] In relation to this, the definition of critical thinking under Merriam Webster is given as the following – "**:**exercising or involving careful judgment or judicious evaluation"[25] The combination of both these considerations in their definitional capacity provide an understanding of whether or not critical thinking has link to research in terms of its evaluative value and consideration. The consideration here should be given to the manner in which research has developed over the various critical approaches to conducting academic and critical thinking. Critical thinking has been given importance not only for the consideration of academic rigor at higher level of education but rather high school level of education as well.

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[24] *Definition of RESEARCH*, Merriam-Webster (Apr. 16, 2023), https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/research.
[25] *Definition of CRITICAL*, Merriam-Webster (Apr. 17, 2023), https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/critical.

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The aim of critical thinking should be to find approaches that will help in giving a definite conclusion to contentions or theses established.

The idea of Critical Thinking and Research

The idea of research can be considered by prescribing what considerations of academic approaches can be established. The research orientations for a particular topic can involve not only a singular conceptual understanding of how critical thinking takes place. The idea is to establish modes of thinking and researching that aims to apply a realistic and original mode of conception between what is required to be observed. Critical thinking should involve a consideration of two overviewing commitments – the idea of committing to find the objective reality of the research question and the methodology used should involve a multifaceted area of expertise. In relation to this, an article stated - "Considerable controversy surrounds how the various research paradigms should be classified. Burrelland Morgan, in their classic framework, suggested four research paradigms: functionalist, interpretive, radical humanist, and radical structuralist. Their framework has been questioned, however, with Deetz arguing that the dimensions of their framework "obscure important differences in current research orientations and lead to poorly formed conflicts and discussions." Guba and Lincoln suggest four underlying paradigms for research: positivist, post-positivist, constructivist, and critical. In their most recent work, however, they acknowledge that there are major issues confronting their own classification scheme. In this article we use Orlikowski and Baroudi's classification scheme, which itself is based on Chua's work. They suggest three research paradigms: positivist, interpretive, and critical. Although we acknowledge that this classification is just one of many, this three-fold distinction seems to have been widely embraced within the IS research literature and is not too dissimilar from Guba and Lincoln's framework. Orlikowski and Baroudi classify research as critical where a critical stance is taken toward taken-for-granted assumptions about organizations and information systems, and where the aim is to critique to status quo "through the exposure of what are believed to be deep-seated, structural contradictions within social systems."[26] The involvement of functionalist, interpretative, racial, humanist, and radical structuralist with positivist, post-positivist, constructivist and critical approaches provides the way in which multiple methodologies and elements can combine together. The idea behind critical thinking and research should involve such a manner of complimenting how research is conducted for a particular topic. Humanitarian academic topics should be considered in light of how multiple sources of analysis can be utilised for research purpose and how critical approaches in studying various subjects can be integrated in the same.

When considering critical thinking in research, the approach should involve the representation it can make in relation to how many groups of a particular society are included. The issue is with regards to whether or not academic spaces allow academic minds to develop from varying backgrounds and sectors of society. Under the article by Myers and Klein, it was stated that - "The Bourdieu lineage gives emphasis to asymmetric distribution of symbolic and social assets in society, which then cause and reproduce (i.e., maintain) discriminatory social stratification between the "haves" and the "have-nots." Important concepts in Bourdieu's theory of practice are habitus, field, and social, cultural, and symbolic capital. Habitus refers to an individual's set of acquired patterns of thought, behaviour, and taste that encodes a certain cultural understanding. The term is used to describe "the unconscious internalization of objective social structures which appear spontaneous and natural, but which are in fact socially conditioned". Each individual occupies a position in a multidimensional social space (a field). Within this dynamic field of forces, an

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[26] Michael D Myers & Heinz K Klein, *A Set of Principles for Conducting Critical Research in Information Systems*, 35 MIS Quarterly 17-36 (2011).

individual is not defined by social class membership, but by the amounts of each kind of capital he or she possesses. Bourdieu extends the original economic concept of capital to include concepts such as social, cultural, and symbolic capital. Bourdieu says that all these forms of capital can be used to produce or reproduce inequality. For example, in his research on higher education in France, Bourdieu found that working class children are seriously under-represented, even though French universities are theoretically open to all. He found that this underrepresentation was not due to a lack of academic talent, but to a lack of cultural capital (e.g., no access to or knowledge of serious music, contemporary literature, and art."[27] The approach here is simple and most fruitful for considering the question at hand – how does one approach the truth of a contention while having a multidimensional and multitudinous academic capacity. The approach of academic institutions should be to install every sector of society in its academic rigor, so showcase the objectivity of representation under a particular academic consideration.

The approach of collective discourse should also be given due consideration when critical thinking is applied in research work. The reader can be unaware of a specific set of consideration that needs to be given during the formation of a particular set of academic critical thinking. Accordingly, Foucault tries to give a combined approach to critical thinking - "The second lineage, culminating in Foucault, concerns itself more with providing tools which individuals can use themselves as they see fit, to free their minds to alternatives by highlighting the way in which power within systems subjugates them. This approach seeks to bring into play, to make visible, the unwritten categories and rules of the system(s), so as to enable individuals to develop responsive strategies to them rather than collectively build shiny new systems. Fundamentally, the issue is

human emancipation or self-emancipation. Some important concepts in Foucault's work are discourse, archaeology, and genealogy of knowledge, and panopticon. The term discourse refers to an extended piece of text (written or verbal) that is governed by rules and conventions of which the user is largely unconscious. Discourse is an intersubjective phenomenon in which a speaker intends to influence the hearer. The archaeology of knowledge is the method Foucault uses to examine the discursive traces left by the past in order to understand the processes that have led to what we are today. The archaeological method aims to reveal the rules of thought of various "discursive formations" in order to show how truth claims emerge in history. Since knowledge is power, a discursive formation is a collection of texts that has become powerful in a particular field. For example, Foucault studied how madness in 19th century psychiatry was "socially constructed by a wide variety of discourses that give rise to collective attitudes or mentalities defining insanity""[28] Through this understanding of how critical thinking should approach various levels of consideration, the idea should be to provide a deeply layered level of analysis and evaluation. This won't be based of whether one discourse has been considered or not but rather the relevant discourses have been considered or not. The previous texts utilised for the analysis of a present or current topic will not be based on a singular approach but rather give substance in relation to whether historical realities were also given substance when evaluation is presented for a critical topic.

The approach of academic consideration should not involve a singular understanding of how theory and reality can be structured down. The involvement should rather be considerate of two types of communicative practices as well – strategic and communicative action. This would involve consideration where communication will become objective and subjective ideological elements of critical

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[27] *Id.*

[28] *Id.*

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thinking and research - "The last lineage, culminating in Habermas, is primarily concerned with developing a systematic theory "that can be applied to collectively emancipate others from a 'worse' to a 'better' state". Some important concepts in Habermas' work are cognitive interests, communicative action, lifeworld, and system. Habermas' (1972) theory of cognitive interests suggests that all knowledge is related to certain fundamental interests. Cognitive interests "are the general orientations or strategies that guide how people acquire and use knowledge to pursue their interests". Habermas distinguishes three cognitive interests: the technical interest, concerned with facilitating human technical control over natural as well as social objects; the practical interest, concerned with practical communication with others; and the emancipatory interest, aimed at overcoming the distortions and imperfections of ordinary communication. Habermas (1984) developed these ideas further in his theory of communicative action, in which he makes a distinction between strategic and communicative action. Strategic (or instrumental) action is where the actors are oriented to "success" and they cooperate or compete based on their own private goals; communicative action is where the participants are oriented toward mutual understanding. Habermas suggests that it is only through the latter that emancipation can be achieved. Habermas also makes an important distinction between three worlds—the objective, social, and subjective worlds—in which human actions take place. The objective world is the external world to which people have shared access (e.g., a building); the social world is the shared world of norms in a particular social situation or culture; the subjective world is one to which each individual has exclusive access."[29] The conundrum behind the manner in which the idea of academic approach should be considered is three fold in terms of how theoretical and realistic considerations should

be present. The objective consideration is where one approaches jurisprudence for academic revelation will be the rationalist in approach. The merit of this approach is in proving a position of deliberation without implementing a personal bias in relation to how academic review of certain topics should be present. The idea here is not to give a single deliberative methodology – working with only objectivity but rather applying other modes of consideration as well – social and subjective approaches. Both these approaches will help in providing balance when critical thinking needs to involve not a singular consideration – this could mean that an approach of academic critical thinking will be able to cater to personal evaluation, at the academic level of engagement.

The idea of critical thinking also involves the manner in which academics need to consider how evidence needs to be analysed and evaluated. The evaluation of evidence can be based upon just a purely textual evaluation, or primary evidence evaluation, consideration for secondary data sources etc. This gives understanding of how critical thinking can delve into one mode of evidence evaluation while at the same time, give more credit to a particular source due to its content and origins – which could differentiate it from primary and secondary sources. There needs to be a constant radicalization of critical thinking in different era's of research building – especially in the 21st century which has moved passed the need to prove a singular hypothesis under critical thinking and research. In order to ensure that this mode of thinking can take place, it should not involve a singular evidentiary evaluation but move from one source to another while keeping it relevant for the purpose of evaluation. In relation to this, the ideal of evidence analysis is set up very well under an article upon critical research reporting - "Much of the research reporting in fields like composition and anthropology today is even more experimental in negotiating the values that mediate research reporting. These are polyphonous or dialogic texts that encode

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[29] *Id.*

multiple voices/perspectives simultaneously and engage the reader more actively in the interpretive process. These texts illustrate developments in new ways of reading and writing in postmodern literature. Marcus and Fischer (1986) refer to experimental texts in their field as modernist ethnographies (to contrast with realist ethnographies), whereas some composition scholars call these multi vocal texts. For example, Kevin Dwyer's (1982) Moroccan Dialogues attempts to build into the text the complexity of the fieldwork/research situation and the polyphony of voices in the research context to encourage readings from multiple points of view. Through a series of lightly edited interview transcripts, Dwyer dramatizes the exploratory, hypothetical, recursive, cumulative interpretive process of the researcher. Through this mode of presentation, he exposes how the neat linear textualization of ethnography distorts the immediacy of the fieldwork situation and hides the researchers' shaky control over their understanding of the culture about which they later write with authority. The readers are similarly taken through the process of arriving at a deeper understanding of the new cultural system - while also acquiring an understanding of their own values and predisposition which motivated the partial initial readings. Gesa Kirsch observes that confronted with an informant who was decidedly against her own feminist perspective, she resorted to providing lengthy excerpts from the interview transcripts to voice the other's opinion, accompanied by her own explanation and theorization. We must note, however, that even in such presentations there is little room for "authentic" representation of the informants' views, as the researcher eventually holds the pen. It is the researcher who enjoys the authority to choose and organize the words of the informants, apart from providing coherence for the text with an overarching generalization or theory (that would neutralize any tensions). A more promising strand of experimentation has focused on co-authoring texts. Such texts are jointly written by the researcher and the informants/subjects and, therefore, considered collaborative reports. They attempt to dramatize the tensions between the perspectives of the researchers and subjects. Keeping in check the usual authority of the researcher/author to offer solutions to contradictions generated by the data, such texts invite the readers to struggle with these tensions."[30]

Conclusion

The critical thinking approach to research remains one of the biggest topics of contentions with the fact that the academic world is constantly evolving. This evolution can lead to linear and multilateral structuring of not only an individual deliberation but multiple levels of deliberation at once. The approach that critical thinking should always be considered under is how reality and evaluation can be conducted to achieve the particular end-goal of the research project. The research project could move from one subject to another to provide an ideal with regards to whether or not a particular subject matter has relevancy to the matter that the research project attempts to deal with. The combination of various forms of critical thinking – structuralist, interpretivist, positivist etc. could help in giving a multi-layered perspective. The ideal for truth can be achieved by critical thinking however, one must consider and keep in mind if they can approach critical thinking in the old traditional manner or should new jurisprudence be built upon whether or not one has considered all the elements of research and critical thinking. The quest for truth will not be possible if the evolution of critical thinking cannot evolve from only a single form and structure of knowledge gathering.

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