

# Educational Critical Exploration by Considering Islamic Approach for Specifying Its Perquisites and Development Approaches in Iranian Higher Education System

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## Abstract

History shows that human being started his life from the most elementary form and used criticism and creativity to evolve it. Achievements of today's human society, development of critical forces and the hardworking of creative forces will bring about tomorrow's completeness. It is obvious that varying human needs, frequent changes of the world, the high rate of progress in science and technology and similarity to modern situations have doubled the need to study criticism in our society. Society, as a whole social system, enjoys an organic and systematic attribute and each of its elements is associated with the whole and is influenced by it. This influence will only be positive and beneficial when the interaction of the elements is organized soundly and in a correct model. This will be realized when the constituting elements (people) of the system have already accepted each other's supervision naturally and logically. Development of a critical atmosphere crystallizes this issue. Therefore, it can be said that societies that provide the proper conditions for the development of criticism have also provided the conditions for the emergence of creative and innovative thoughts. Societies that disregard different ideas in their actions and do not heed their criticisms, should never expect their people to have innovation and creativity. There is not enough research on the issue of criticism based on Islamic principles. Therefore, the present study tries to investigate educational criticism taking into account the considerations of Islamic principles and perquisites that influence the conditions and obstacles in the creation of critical atmosphere in Iranian higher education centers and universities. The study uses the method of systematic review of previous research to identify the situation of research implications and gaps.

**Keywords:** educational criticism, Islamic approach, higher education system

## 1. Introduction

Criticism is known as the attitude of the modern era; however, it can also be known as a simultaneous matter to the advent of human as a creature that has been separated from animals if we identify humans as intelligent creatures. This means that they can think; as a result, criticism is an inseparable part of this very thinking. In other words, human, thought and criticism are born together. Traces of criticism can be seen in the most complicated and at the same time simplest thoughts. Criticism is as old as humans are. It is thinking but it does not mean to rethink or to get stuck in thinking. Criticism is a thought that is thinking. It stops thought from repetition and thinking. As man thinks, he is being criticized and he is also criticizing. Thinking and criticism are the expression of one concept in two words. Criticism is a complaint against routineness and since habit has static principals, it tries to change them. In this status, a habitual thought is challenged (Abedini, 2011). This is the reason why criticism can be recognized as the driving motor of societies and the best tool for human society's dynamism. Humans are intelligent and explorative and this very trait has created a lot of intelligence and cultural work throughout history. These works, which are life tools, include myths, art, poetry, religious, ethical, and legal values and norms, symbols and their meaning and, above all, language are created from human questioning and exploration. These tools are used to solve human problems that continue and never stop. What makes creativity and mental, artistic, and technical creation live on is the basis of criticism which aims to improve things and never allows humans to be happy about their present statues (Mokhtari, 2002).

In religious and Islamic teachings, the excessive terms used for advice, notification, exhortation, listening to others' words, following the best, recommendation to the right, invitation to good, and recommendation to good and forbidding evil show the position and importance of criticism. In Quran, we read: “فَيَسِّرْ عِبَادَ الَّذِينَ يَسْتَمِعُونَ”؛ “الْقَوْلَ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ أَحْسَنَهُ”؛ “so give tidings to those servants of mine who listen to words, then follow the best!” In the word “listen” lies a special intentionality that does not exist in the word “hear”. Listening is different from hearing unintentionally. One who listens, also criticizes and evaluates all the good, bad, ugly and beautiful implications of words and then makes a choice. Also, when choosing, he somehow weighs better and best options, and in the end, by evaluating all aspects of the words, selects the best and the most logical option he can (Eslampour, 2013). Quran says: “وَ ذَكَرْ فَإِنَّ الذِّكْرَ يَنْفَعُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ”؛ “so advise, because it influences believers”. Notifying changes forgetfulness and unawareness into awareness and the awakening of consciousness and makes everyone in a society to care for everything. In such a society, negligence, idleness, and evil doing is rare and each member of the society considers himself obliged to advise and notify others so matters will fall into their real place. Many of the Quran verses and the Prophet and Imams' sayings (called hadith) imply that believers, should not provide any opportunities for flattering people and those who always speak of good things and cover deficiencies and should, instead, befriend people, praise and criticize them at the same time and show their competences and deficiencies to them like a mirror of good and evil. Imam Sadegh (pbuh) says: “المؤمن أخو المؤمن عينه لا يخونه ولا يظلمه ولا يغشاه ولا يعده عدة فيخلفه”؛ “a believer is the brother of another believer and he's his eye, never oppresses or betrays him, never cheats on him and never breaks a promise to him” (Sharifi, 2013).

Also, Imam Kazem (pbuh) says: “... وَ سَاعَةَ لِمُعَاشَرَةِ الْإِخْوَانِ وَ النَّقَاتِ الَّذِينَ يُعَرِّفُونَكُمْ عُيُوبَكُمْ وَ يُخْلِصُونَ لَكُمْ فِي الْبَاطِنِ”؛ “... and dedicate a portion of your time to your religious brothers, who are trustworthy and tell your deficiencies and incompetence to you and are pure at heart with you”. The educational points of this Hadith (saying of a holy person) are:

- A. It is necessary to plan and invest for social and individual pathology in a religious society.
- B. Pure and trustworthy critics are rare.
- C. Critics should be pathologic and have knowledge on matters they are criticizing.
- D. Criticism should be free from fraud, deception, and impurity.

In a dished land, two things benefit rain: one is the direct rainfall and the other is the water streaming from a height down into it. Acceptance of criticism, not only does not degrade a person's personality socially and politically, but it can also be said that it is the most obvious evidence of human personality and evolution. As Imam Khomeini (pbuh) mentions “if you notice your mistake, then admit it because this admission will make you seem great in nation's view, and this admission of mistake does not degrade you. Initial bitterness of criticism will be removed by its sweet achievements. The beneficial implications of criticism always makes a human expose himself to other peoples' criticism and never consider himself as not needing it (Askari Eslampour, 2012).

Imam Javad (pbuh) says: “المؤمن يحتاج إلى توفيق من الله و وأعظم من نفسه و قبول ممن ينصحه”؛ “a believer, needs divine grace, common sense, and other people's advice”. Also, Imam Ali says: “العاقل من رأيه و لم يتق بكل ما”؛ “an intelligent person is one who accuses his own idea and does not trust what his inner self tempts him/her to do”. Given the interpretation of the term “who accuses his own idea”, a believer should build a court for his thoughts and ask wise people to judge him.

Imam Ali has also illustrated this necessity as follows: “ق علي العاقل ان يضيف إلى رأيه رأي الفضلاء و يضم إلى علمه”؛ “It is suitable that a wise human adds the ideas of other thinkers to his own ideas and uses scholars' knowledge for his opinions [by asking comments and listening to others' criticisms]”. Therefore, criticizing others and accepting others' criticism are constructive and important for a society's statues. If criticism does not exist and ideas and works continue without revision, reviewing, and criticism, then no improvements will be gained; because they are not free of flaws (Alikhani, 1998).

Criticism in anthropology is the type of values, beliefs, and constructional meanings governing evaluative behaviors of a specific group or individual when they distinguish between good and bad, right and evil, beautiful and ugly, and completeness from deficiency; a material and spiritual matter belonging to one's self of someone else. Therefore, it should be stated that criticism is a structural and distinctive feature of academic communities and higher education centers. The history of science in western industrial societies shows that the development of science in these societies was accompanied by criticism. One the most important requirements for progress in any country is the existence of effective human resources and critics; as a result, qualified human resources are

the among the most important assets of any country. One of the features of a developed society is designing of a mechanism to attract experts and to educate ideal, open-minded, intelligent, and critical human resources (Masoodi, 1995).

Universities and higher education centers are among the most effective organizations for the development of a society. They are the protectors and transmitters of cultural heritage and values of the society and are responsible for the development of knowledge and technology as well as the socio-economic-political and cultural relations in a society. In other words, any type of evolution in different human life aspects is called development. Scientific development is a continuous objective and balances the relationship among science, technology, education, and culture in a society. Therefore, higher education both is influenced by a society's culture and influences it; it is formed by the society and helps form it, it needs resources and provides the society with resources in the form of eligible individuals, workforce, educated citizens, and discoverers of useful knowledge. Today, universities should, as well as producing science and developing knowledge boundaries, respond to a society's demands and avoid following the traditional methods. In fact, on the one hand, they should admit the variable, widespread, and significant social commitments of their society and, on the other hand, create the required dynamism and transformation in their internal process and educational system and curriculum. In this way they can, in addition to producing science, be effective in admitting the roles of socialization, acculturation, reproduction, and transmission of culture and values by training specialized forces and multiple-skilled experts in accordance with the needs of the society, labor market and being effective in rebuilding the social and economic systems (Fazeli, 2008). Therefore, in order to create a creative, dynamic and scientific atmosphere in universities in higher education centers and to strengthen the social relations, all the internal and external factors of disorder in human relations should be eliminated. This means that group work should be encouraged and courage, creativity, criticism, exploration, and prospect should be supported. Academic independence is also considered as one of the perquisites of scientific in the development process (Fazeli, 2008).

## 2. Theoretical Framework

The 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed great events for humankind. The development of science and technology promised a better and more comfortable life for humans; however, the abuse of knowledge resulted in mass killings such as the ones in the two world wars. This atmosphere of hope and anxiety set the ground for the formation of critical thoughts and criticism theories.

Members of the Frankfurt School in social sciences began their work under such conditions, which was later followed by the creation of the movement known as Frankfurt School or Critical Theory (Nozari, 2005). It can be stated that the concept of critical theory was actually the main axis of intellectual, philosophical, and theoretical research and the center for studying new ideas and thoughts (Nozari, 2005). In this regard, Adorno believes that critical theory and criticism were not a structured philosophical system with a single meaning for all the institute's members. Rather, it was a collection of common assumptions that distinguished the solution of the Frankfurt school in terms of nonexistence theory. The fundamentals of these scholars' thoughts can be summarized as below:

\*- Critique of the capitalist system in the light of Marxist thought

\*- Critique of the instrumental reasoning of positivist philosophy

\*- Cultural Criticism (Ritz, 1995)

From what has been said, it becomes clear that criticism was the main feature of Frankfurt scholars (Koose, 2006). Theorists of the social department of Frankfurt School also considered the issue of criticism culture and offered a criticism called culturalization. Of course, cultural criticism has a long history. For example, Socrates (399-470) criticized the relativism of his own era; Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1787) explored civilization in the book, *Social Contract*. In his opinion, early humans, although lacking modern civilization facilities, yet lived in maximum happiness. Niche also had critical opinions towards the culture governing his era and believed that the new world has brought about non-existentialism and mass living for humans (Niche, 1844-1900). In his opinion, humans are accustomed to mass living in the modern era; no one tries to separate himself from the mass or even critically looks at other peoples' lifestyle (Niche, 1979). Barrett defines criticism as a word that is a secondary language to another or, according to logicians, is the meta-language implemented on the primary language. The application of criticism should consider two points, the suitability of the criticism language with the desired language of the writer or speaker and the suitability of this subject language with the world. In addition, the proximity of these two languages is the feature of criticism. It may also have a great resemblance with another mental activity called logic. The reason is that logic is also completely based on subject language and meta-language (Barrett, 2003).

In Iran, social criticism existed in part of literary texts; however, it was mostly ironic and mystified. For example, life lessons were narrated in animal language like *The Story of Mouse and Cat* by Abid Zakani. Here, the social poet is mostly an adviser, like Saadi in Golestan, and since he wants to explicitly and clearly criticize, he inevitably is trapped by satire and parody. Although the Islamic Iranian culture did not have a shortage of intelligent faces, because of a unity paradigm, the logic of criticism was never formed. Even Khyyam's aggression, the humanism of Rumi and Saadi, the logical analyses of Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd, wisdom of Ferdowsi, Farabi, Ibn Khaldun, and Zakariya Razi and Ghazali's criticism of Hafez, did not lead to the formation of criticism (Ashuri, 2008). It should be said that the most serious problem that exists in the area of criticism in Iran results from applying a unilateral definition of criticism, i.e. exclusive critique. Due to the lack of an understanding of the concept of criticism, many define it as mere critique. In other words, they do not express merits along with deficiencies in the process of criticism. It is from this very position that a critic only perceives the subject being criticized unilaterally without paying attention to the normative aspects of criticism.

Because of this unilateral position, criticism was never formed without particular biases in Iran. Moreover, little research has been done to explore this area. However, some researchers have studied criticism and its different types from various aspects. Research shows that, despite the importance of criticism as a fundamental tool for transformation and knowledge development in universities and higher education centers, few traces of criticism is observed among professors and students, and still, many universities and higher education centers do not involve students in critical thinking activities. In a research done by Eslami (2005), it was shown that the majority of first and last grade students of clinical nursing are a weak in criticizing and thinking critically. Raji (1997), in his thesis on an evaluation of critical thought prevalence among students of Azad University of Khorasgan branch, evaluated critical thinking with a descriptive-explorative research and showed that the students totally lacked critical thinking. Zeraat (2009) evaluated the critical thinking skills of Shiraz University students using a descriptive-explorative method and found that critical thinking skills were low in all study groups. In another research done by Shah-Vali (1995), about the application of teaching critical thinking in higher education in response to social demands, it was shown that the obtained pattern for the teaching of critical thinking principles or the ability to ask questions and analyze the solutions had positive results. Fazeli (2008), in an comparative study on Iranian and British academic culture based on live experience during doctorate education course in the University of London, examined the inefficiency reasons of academic education and scientific development problems in Iran and found lack of critical culture in universities as one of the main reasons. In another research performed by Moin (2006), among the obstacles found against scientific development in Iran, were weak self-confidence and self-esteem, the use of religion and science as tools, lack of research culture and weakness in scientific discussion including lack of criticism while encountering scientific attitudes and findings. Hemati (2010), in a research titled cultural pathology of scientific development in universities and higher education centers, found that lack of a realistic policy, accusing experts and graduates, non-scientific management, prevalence of a military and security atmosphere, lack of support for thought and hypothesis, and lack of a critical spirit were the most important obstacles against cultural and scientific development in Iran.

The research done by Agnes and Mary (2005) showed that teachers in all educational aspects need a critical thinking model and a critical spirit. Sezer (2008) believed that critical spirit and critical thinking are not only the major goals of educational systems in any society, but it is also a primary condition and the duty of academic education. Fasyk (2007), in a research about critical thinking in higher education centers realized that critical thinking skills develop students' understanding to better understand the universe. Gan (2008) in a research regarding education in higher education centers discovered that higher education should provide opportunities for learners so they can perform intellectual activities and evaluate modern and new knowledge that they are dealing with. Ubnex (2010), examined critique in different forms and showed that a leader's cooperative and reactive responding strategies towards critiques regarding the leader's power had the most important effects on the continuity of a specific plan and receiving support from people around him.

In short, criticism is believed to play an important role in higher education centers and universities. Today, universities not only have the duty to produce and develop it but they should also respond to the society's needs, leave the traditional methods, transform their educational system and curriculum and try to admit the social-cultural roles and values. This must be done in order to create a dynamic and scientific space in universities, to strengthen critical thinking among the actors of universities particularly professors students, to eliminate the current obstacles in governing university and research, and provide the possibility for a cultural lifestyle in universities such as the skill of collective work, having courage, creativity, criticism, exploration, and prospect, and strengthening academic independence and academic management and eliminate cultural and

scientific development oppressions.

### 3. Conclusion

If scientific experts do not provide proper mechanisms to consciously, freely, and intentionally develop criticism in the society, that society will be depressed and instead of development, it will stagnate or fully stop (Ashuri, 2009). It is because of this that Imam Ali (pbuh), despite being infallible, accepts critiques from anyone and likes his critics and avoids flatterers. At the end of the Jamal battle, he told his troops that they were his rightful followers and religious brothers "... so help me with good intention and pure advices free from any doubts" (Nahjolbalaghe, sermon 118, p. 150). Also, he states that people should not avoid telling the right thing or consulting in justice because he does not consider himself so superior that he would be without mistakes and immune to mistaking (Nahjolbalaghe, sermon 118, p. 150). And to Talha and Zubair he said, "I did not need your opinion in the governance, and there was not a matter of which I had been unaware of or needed to consult it with you and the rest of my brothers, and if this was not the case, I would not be avoiding you" (Nahjolbalaghe, sermon 196, p. 247). In another sermon, he advised his followers to honest advice, "so help me with an advice that is free of incorrectness and doubt" (Nahjolbalaghe, sermon 117, p. 149). Concerning free and fearless critique, he told his administrators, "for those who need your time, leave a part of your time free, so you can personally accept them and be present in a public session with them and don't let your military forces be present there, so they can fully state their words without fear...and try to be tolerant towards them by not showing aggressive behavior, and prevent any strictness and violence towards them" (Nahjolbalaghe, sermon 53, p. 376). In addition, he emphasizes exceptionability in a general way by saying, "O' God's servants, assess yourself before you are assessed and judge yourself before you are judged..." (Nahjolbalaghe, sermon 89, p. 104).

If critical spirit leaves a society and everyone accepts everything as it is, then the society loses its evolutionary path and stops developing. Administrative laws do not change and do not become revised in this society. The exchange of goods remains the same, educational systems remains unchanged, artistic works change into stereotypical works, and generally, any type of creativity and innovation is left alone (Maadikhai, 2000). This study aimed to investigate the issue from an educational and Islamic view. Higher education centers and universities must be investigated and analyzed and criticized. The results of this research can be used in cultural planning and elimination of cultural oppression in order to gain scientific development in universities and higher education centers and the country. It should be mentioned that research considering educational, social, cultural, and scientific problems in Iran are usually done based on customized schemes of administration offices and this has had an important implication for university fields. For example, such research has mainly been limited to explorative, descriptive, and quantitative investigations. In other words, university on the government's behalf has not become a modern critic for human education. Therefore, it seems that the recognition of critical position and the perquisites of creating this approach in scientific communities specially higher education centers and universities requires the development of deep and creative research in this area. Finally, it should be noted that, under current conditions, the study of this matter is important and necessary in all our educational levels (elementary, secondary and higher education).

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