

## Topic

Children must be taught, 'how to think', not 'what to think'.

## Outline

### 1) Introduction

**Thesis Statement:** Teaching <sup>children</sup> 'how to think' instead of 'what to think' is fundamental to the development of critical thinking ability.

However, use of conventional methods in formal and informal institutions create numerous obstacles in realization of this goal. Still, it can be overcome by adaption of advanced teaching and learning techniques.

2) Teaching children 'what to think' translates into monotonous and static thought pattern

3) Teaching children 'how to think' translates into development of critical thinking and analyzing ability

4) Why teaching children 'what to think' is undesirable

a) This method leads to non-interactive learning

Case in Point: South Korea's education system has been known for its emphasis on non-interactive learning

b) Cognitive abilities of children remain underdeveloped

Case in Point: Cultural Revolution in China from 1966 to 1976 leads to <sup>loss of</sup> cognitive abilities

c) Transmission approach inhibits co-creation of knowledge

Case in Point: During the Soviet Era, curriculum was designed to instill the principles of Marxism-Leninism.

5) Why teaching <sup>children</sup> 'how to think' is highly desirable

a) This method broadens the learning horizons of children

Case in Point: Finnish Education System promotes a more open and exploratory approach to children

b) Such methods lay foundation for spirit of free inquiry

Case in Point: The Montessori Method developed by Dr. Maria Montessori in early 1900s.

c) This thinking method produces thought leaders in society

Case in Point: Case Studies of Malala Yousafzai and Albert Einstein.

d) This thinking pattern promotes decision making on rational and scientific basis

Case in Point: Sweden fosters

the development of rational and

scientific decision-making skills  
e) Critical thinking ability is the  
cornerstone of modern knowledge  
economies

Case in Point: Singapore and Netherlands  
educational approach is aligned  
with economic strategies

f) This approach leads to innovation  
and progress in material and  
non-material aspects of life

Case in Point: South Korea's transform-  
ation from a war-torn nation  
in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century to a  
global economic and technological  
powerhouse in the 21st century

6) Obstruction in switching the  
teaching approach from 'what  
to think' to 'how to think'

a) Obsolete learning and teaching  
techniques

b) Outdated assessment mechanisms  
that offer non-incentive for  
critical thinking

c) Lack of liberal values in  
institutions to promote free  
inquiry

Way forward to prioritize 'how to  
think' approach

a) Advanced and scientific methods  
for teaching, learning, and  
assessment

b) Promoting, appreciating and

rewarding critical thinking ability  
among students

### 8) Conclusion

Education system <sup>of children</sup> ↑ based on 'how to think' strategy rather than 'what to think' would encourage critical thinking and creativity which can lead to significant advancements in various fields.

# Essay

In an era marked by diverse perspectives, rapidly evolving information and complex global challenges, the importance of fostering critical thinking skills in children has never been more evident. Rather than merely instructing them on what to think, it is essential to focus on teaching children how to think. As teaching them what to think translates into uninteresting and fixed thought pattern.

Like this strategy leads to non-interactive learning and underdevelopment of cognitive skills of children. On the contrary, teaching children how to think is synonymous to development of critical thinking and analyzing skills. Simultaneously, this pattern broadens the learning horizons of children, and produce thought leaders in society as well. However, impediments are faced by teacher to switch from what to think to how to think strategy. Still the

latter can be prioritized by inducing advanced and scientific methods in education, and by promoting critical thinking abilities in students. In the words of

**Albert Einstein:**

**"Education is not the learning of facts, but the training of mind to think."**

At the outset, it has been established that critical thinking skills are elemental for the development of children minds. The next section of this essay will decode that teaching children 'what to think' results in static thoughts while teaching them 'how to think' leads to dynamics in their thinking abilities. Moving on, the essay will elucidate - with the aid of examples - how teaching methods prove to be undesirable or desirable, and impediments in switching from one approach to another. Eventually, the discussion will be folded up by proposing a framework to prioritize 'how to think' approach.

Teaching children 'what to think' inadvertently leads to the development

of monotonous and static patterns. When young minds are fed up of steady diet of predetermined information and rigid beliefs, their ability to question, explore, and innovate is stifled. They become accustomed to accepting information leading to passive, rote learning experience. In contrast, an educational approach that emphasizes 'how to think' encourages children to engage actively with material analyzing different perspectives, and form their own opinions. It cultivates a dynamic and adoptable mindset that is better equipped to navigate the complexities of the modern world by fostering creativity and independent thought.

Firstly, the teaching method of 'what to think' leads to non-interactive learning of children. Several countries have been criticized for following educational method that prioritize rote learning and memorization at the expense of fostering creativity. One such example is South Korea's education system which is known for its focus on non-interactive learning. In South Korean schools, students are often required to memorize large

amounts of information and spend long hours studying to prepare for high-stakes entrance exams and standardized tests. This approach leads to highly structured environment where students are not encouraged to question or explore topics resulting in the non-interactiveness of children in learning. This clearly underscores the fact that teaching children what to think is highly undesirable for them.

Similarly, the adoption of what to think approach results in the underdevelopment of cognitive skills of children. Certainly, there are historical examples from various countries and societies where education systems rigidly taught children what to think has been criticized. However, this approach potentially stifled their cognitive abilities and underdevelopment of their minds. An example worth mentioning in this regard is of Cultural Revolution in China in 1966 to 1976. During the revolution, Chinese students were subjected to highly prescriptive education and ideological



indoctrination. They were taught to adhere strictly to Communist Party Doctrine. In this way, critical thinking, individualism, and diverse perspectives were discouraged or suppressed. So, the consequences of this education system resulted in loss of critical thinking skills. This example shows that, how the teaching approach of 'what to think' is unwelcomed.

Moving on, the 'what to think' approach inhibits the co-creation of knowledge leaving the little room for questioning or co-creation of knowledge. In this system, students are expected to conform to the prescribed beliefs leading to the suppression of diverse ideas. The education system of former Soviet Union deserves mention here.

During the Soviet Era, particularly in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the education system in countries like the USSR was heavily centralized and ideologically driven. The curriculum was primarily designed to instill the principles of Marxism-Leninism and adherence to state's official ideology. This approach prioritized the

transmission of specific ideological beliefs and knowledge and resulted in limitation of students ability to broader understanding of the world. Hence it is proved that proposal of what to think is very undesirable.

On the contrary, teaching children 'how to think' is desirable as this method broadens the learning horizons of children. The approach contribute to their intellectual development.

Teachers focus on understanding the individual needs and interests of students, and adopt the curriculum accordingly. Moreover, it put emphasis on inquiry-based learning where students are encouraged to ask questions, and explore topics of interest. Finland is often cited as a country that emphasizes on teaching children how to think, fostering critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills.

Furthermost Finnish education system promotes more open and exploratory approach emphasizing on inquiry-based learning. This example shows how an education system that values teaching children how to think can broaden their learning horizons

and prepare them for a diverse and complex world.

In addition, the method of 'how to think' lays foundation for spirit of free inquiry. In this system, the child is at the centre of educational experience. Teachers act as guides and facilitators, allowing children to explore their interests and learn at their own. An example that helps depict this situation is the Montessori Method developed by Dr. Maria Montessori in the early 1900s. According to the method, Montessori students are encouraged to choose their own activities and projects based on their interests. This autonomy fosters a sense of ownership over their learning. It also lays the foundation for a spirit of free inquiry as it instill in children the belief that their questions are valued. Thus, the process of how to think is highly desirable in societies.

Moreover, on political front, the process of teaching children 'how to think' produces thought leaders in society. While there are numerous

examples of individuals who have benefitted from such an educational approach. One such example is of the Pakistani activist and Nobel laureate, Malala Yousafzai. She advocated for girls' education, was encouraged to think critically and stand up for her beliefs. Her experiences in education and her determination to learn and lead have had a significant impact on society. Another example is of one of the most renowned scientists of 20<sup>th</sup> century, Albert Einstein. He developed the theory of relativity and was known for his independent and creative thinking. His early education in Switzerland emphasized independent learning and critical thinking which played a crucial role in his intellectual development. These examples highlight the impact of an educational approach - that empowers individuals to think independently, question the status quo, and pursue their passions.

Furthermore, this thinking pattern promotes decision-making on rational and scientific basis. In this educational model, children are presented with real-

world challenges and encouraged to use logical reasoning and critical thinking to find solutions. This process helps them develop a rational approach to decision-making. While science education is based on experimentation, observation, and data analysis. One example worth mentioning here is of some European countries particularly in the Scandinavian region mainly Sweden. In Sweden, students are encouraged to ask questions and explore subjects deeply. The curriculum often includes open-ended projects and investigations allowing students to engage in scientific inquiry and rational analysis. This approach prepares students for academic success, and is therefore highly acceptable.

A country following the method of teaching with 'how to think' approach is the cornerstone of modern knowledge economies. Such system prepares students for the demands of knowledge based economy in the era where economy is considered the base for all activities.

of a nation or government. Here, in this system students are encouraged to analyze issues, find solutions, and think critically about real world economy related issues. The case studies of Singapore and Netherlands are worth mentioning here. Both countries primary focus is on those learning methods which encourage students to work together on collaborative learning, share ideas, and engage in discussions. As a result, they are well prepared to contribute to a variety of fields including business, marketing, economy related fields. So, this approach is highly appreciable for society.

Lastly, this approach leads to innovation and progress in material and non-material aspects of life as well. It emphasizes on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education. The curriculum engages children to critical thinking, problem-solving, and innovation in these fields which leads to significant technological advancements. One striking example here is of South Korea. The country

has transformed itself from a was-tan nation in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century to a global economic and technological powerhouse in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Its educational model played a significant role in this transformation. In addition to this, South Korea has seen a rise in entrepreneurship and startups driven by generation of young thinkers who were encouraged to explore their ideas and create new businesses. Hence, the approach of 'how to think' is desirable by countries around the globe.

So far, it has been fairly established that the approach of 'how to think' leads to the development of societies, while the approach of 'what to think' is not acceptable by societies. The next part of essay will present some obstructions in switching the teaching approach from 'what to think' to 'how to think'. After that, the final section of essay provide way forward to prioritize 'how to think' approach.

Firstly, the obstruction in switching in teaching method is a formidable challenge rooted in the persistence of obsolete learning and teaching techniques. The inertia of these outdated methods can be attributed to variety of factors including resistance to change from educators, rigid curriculum structures, and ingrained expectations of standardized testing. However, the shift towards cultivating critical thinking is imperative in a rapidly evolving world where synthesizing information is paramount.

Secondly, the other impediment in switching from traditional teaching method is outdated assessment mechanism that offers non-incentive for critical thinking. These methods are multiple-choice tests and standardized exams, which often prioritize the recall of facts and information over the application and synthesis of knowledge. The obstruction lies in the fact that these assessments tend to be deeply entrenched in educational systems, and play a crucial role in determining academic success and future opportunities.



To facilitate the shift towards fostering critical thinking, it is essential to reimagine assessment strategies.

In last, the lack of liberal values in institutions to promote free inquiry is also the obstruction in switching the teaching approach. In some environments, there is reluctance to encourage open-mindedness, diversity of thought, and intellectual exploration. This is often due to various factors including ideological bias, censorship, or rigid adherence to dogma which stifles the pursuit of knowledge and critical thinking. To overcome this obstacle, there needs to be a renewed commitment to liberal values.

Keeping in mind the obstructions discussed above, there is way forward to prioritize the measures to adopt 'how to think' approach in teaching methods.

A cogent first step is to adopt the advanced and scientific methods, learning, and

assessment in teaching methods in order to develop societies. The second step is to promote, appreciate and reward the critical thinking abilities among students. Ultimately, the way forward involves a collective commitment from educators, policymakers, and society as a whole to create an educational landscape that equips students with skills they need to thrive in an ever-evolving, knowledge-driven world.

To be concluded, it can be stated that education system of children should be based on 'how to think' approach rather than 'what to think' approach. As former would encourage the critical thinking skills and abilities among children. However, there are obstructions like outdated teaching mechanisms, and lack of liberal values, etc in achieving this method. Still it can be prioritized by collaborative efforts, and by advanced techniques used by teachers in teaching methods. In this way, societies will move toward progress and prosperity.