






The influence of the social environment on the development of critical thinking skills in young people: A study in the city of Durrës, Albania

 Merlina Koseni

(Pograzha)^{1*}

 Enkelejda Cenaj²

 Ramiola Kalemi³

 Mimoza Ikonomi⁴

^{1,2,3} University Aleksandër Moisiu, Durrës, Albania.

¹Email: merlinapograzha@uamd.edu.al

²Email: enicenaj@gmail.com

³Email: kalemi_ramiola@yahoo.com

⁴Youth for Social Changes, Youth NGO in Albania, Albania.

⁴Email: mimoza.ikonomi@gmail.com



(+ Corresponding author)

ABSTRACT

Article History

Received: 12 April 2024

Revised: 20 September 2024

Accepted: 10 October 2024

Published: 1 January 2025

Keywords

Critical thinking

Family

Peers

School

Social networks

Young people.

Critical thinking is an essential skill for individuals, especially young people, enabling them to analyze and evaluate information to make informed decisions. Young people who are able to make informed decisions have the opportunity to improve their future and contribute to a better society. In Albania, the level of development of young people's critical thinking skills, according to the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), is very low. In this context, this work aims to explore the social environments that influence the development of critical thinking in young people. The study employed quantitative and qualitative approaches, as well as an analysis of secondary data extracted from similar studies. The quantitative method consists of the analysis of a questionnaire that was completed by 260 young people from 15–30 years of age. The study data show that schools, society, and social media play a very important role in the development of young people's critical thinking skills. The data confirmed that the socioeconomic status of families influences critical thinking abilities. This highlights the importance of supporting young people from all walks of life to ensure that they all have the opportunity to develop critical thinking, regardless of social background. The findings of this study are important for understanding and fostering the development of critical thinking skills in young people. This research supports teachers, parents, policymakers, researchers, and others in their efforts.

Contribution/Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature by exploring the social environments that impact the development of critical thinking in young people. The originality of the study lies in the holistic examination of the roles played by schools, families, society, and social media in shaping the critical thinking skills of young people in Albania.

1. INTRODUCTION

Critical thinking is a crucial ability that helps people, to assess and analyze data and come to well-informed conclusions. It is a system of judgements utilized for the analysis, evaluation, and interpretation of data based on contemplation and information. [Facione \(2011\)](#) demonstrates in his article "Critical Thinking: What it is and Why it Counts" that experts consider the cognitive skills of interpretation, analysis, evaluation, conclusion, explanation, and self-regulation to be the cornerstones of critical thinking. Critical thinking helps us express a judgment or argue a position and make a decision about a fact or an event in our daily lives. For this reason, critical thinking is important

for the development of a just and democratic society. According to [Dam and Volman \(2004\)](#) critical thinking is an essential competence for citizens in a democratic society and gives them the ability to contribute to society. Teaching young people to make decisions means making them capable of improving their future and becoming contributors to society. Benesch stated that "There is a position that the transition to a critical level of thinking in a particular community is a necessary prerequisite for the beginning of the civilized development of this community." ([Benesch, 1993](#)).

Albania is a country that has been striving to build a democratic society for more than three decades. One of the main challenges is the development of critical thinking among young people and the promotion of civic engagement. Occasionally, reforms have been undertaken to develop curricula in Albanian schools. These reforms emphasize the importance of equipping students with a range of competencies, such as critical thinking, finding and analyzing information from various sources, and using multiple learning strategies ([UNESCO, 2017](#)). However, these reforms have not yielded the desired results. Very few studies have been done on the critical thinking skills of young people in Albania, but they show that their critical thinking ability is not sufficiently developed and the implementation of reforms in education is not at the right level. In their study, [Teqja and Dennis \(2016\)](#) note that although radical structural changes have been made in Albania's education system, the same cannot be said for the process and content of learning. In the higher education system in Albania, there is a lack of encouragement to deal with new ideas and information, a lack of promotion of critical thinking, and detachment from reality models ([Teqja & Dennis, 2016](#)). According to [Vavla and Sota \(2018\)](#) learner-centered approaches and other strategies that foster young people's creativity and curiosity are not used in classrooms. Meanwhile, if we refer to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which evaluates students' knowledge and abilities in science, math, and reading at the age of 15 and uses texts to examine how well students can solve complex problems, think critically, and communicate effectively, we find that young people in Albania lack developed critical thinking abilities. According to the [OECD \(2023\)](#) young people in Albania have poorly developed critical thinking skills. The average score in reading performance is one of the lowest among the participating countries and economies, and the percentage of low performers in reading (below proficiency level 2) is one of the highest.

In this context, it is important to understand what influences the formation of young people's critical thinking skills. Attention should not just be focused on educational institutions. In his work, [Jashari \(2013\)](#) emphasizes that school is not the only satisfactory means, no matter how powerful it might be. Critical thinking, as both a philosophy and practice, should be part of everyone's mindset and activity, including politicians, leaders from various sectors, scientists, philosophers, lawyers, and businesspeople—essentially all individuals considered "actors" in Albanian social life ([Jashari, 2013](#)). Additionally, the study by [Mathews and Lowe \(2011\)](#) states that although school is the most influential environment in the development of critical thinking skills among students, other contextual factors, such as family and broader cultural aspects, influence individuals' opportunities to engage in critical thinking as a relatively stable way of thinking. Different social environments also influence the complex process of young people's development.

Given the circumstances where the level of development of critical thinking among young people is low and there are very few studies on this topic, it is necessary to further explore the factors that influence the development of young people's skills in Albania. Therefore, this study seeks to fill a gap in the existing literature by examining the social contexts that impact critical thinking development among young Albanians.

In this paper, we aim to investigate the impact of four main environments – school, family, peers, and social media – on the critical thinking skills of young people. As we analyze the complex interplay between these environments, the focus is on the distinct role that each one plays in shaping the cognitive abilities of the younger generation.

By interpreting the perceptions of young people in the city of Durrës, we aim to understand how different aspects of the social environment contribute to or hinder the development of critical thinking skills. By analyzing the

responses provided by the survey participants, our objective is to gain valuable insights into the broader discourse on youth development.

By exploring the multifaceted nature of the relationship between social environments and critical thinking, this study attempts to show that educational practices, family dynamics, peer interactions, and digital literacy initiatives must be intertwined to improve youth development. Through this exploration, we hope to not only understand the current state of critical thinking among young people but also pave the way for informed strategies that foster cognitive growth and resilience in the ever-changing contexts to which today's youth are exposed in their formative years.

Research significance: This study is significant for its contribution to educational policies and practices in Albania and beyond. By identifying the social environments that shape young people's critical thinking skills, policymakers can develop more effective interventions and policies in this direction.

1.1. Research Questions

1. *Which environment most influences the growth and development of critical thinking skills?*
2. *Does the education level of young people influence the development of critical thinking?*
3. *Does critical thinking depend on the socioeconomic status of the youths' families?*

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Many different philosophers have argued the importance of critical thinking. Socrates emphasized the importance of critical thinking skills in creating a just society. Through his method of cognition, he encourages individuals to challenge conventional knowledge, think independently, and reach their own conclusions. In the dialogue "Republic," Socrates explores the ideal form of government and the nature of justice (Ferrari, 2000). He argues that a just society is one where individuals engage in critical reflection by challenging oppressive structures and cultivating knowledge.

John Locke, who was an English philosopher and physician, also emphasized the power of reason and critical thinking in his philosophical ideas. For Locke, independent thinking and rational judgment are of particular importance. People have the ability to reason and should make decisions based on their rational reasoning.

Immanuel Kant was a philosopher who also emphasized the importance of independent reasoning and critical thinking. He emphasized that we should have the courage to use our own reasoning. In the essay "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" he states that "enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity" (Kant, 1992). This immaturity is not caused by a lack of understanding but by an individual's lack of courage to use their mind without allowing others to direct them. Human beings are rational; therefore, they should critically reflect on science, morality, aesthetics, and everyday life issues.

He argues that an open society is one in which individuals are free to criticize and challenge dominant beliefs or institutions, developing an environment where critical thinking thrives.

One factor that influences the development of young people's skills is family. The family is the main agent of socialization of individuals. Many studies suggest that a supportive and intellectually stimulating family environment contributes to improving critical thinking skills in young people. When there is conversation, debate and the unfolding of different perspectives within the family, children can develop critical skills more easily (Ennis, 2015). Conversely, the lack of such an environment can hinder the creation of critical thinking skills in young people. In "Critical thinking predictors: The role of family-related and motivational variables," Vidal et al. (2023) point out that "the most important results showed that family-related variables influenced critical thinking indirectly through students' aspirations and their self-regulating competencies." Research indicates that boosting parental involvement in education and assisting families in fostering their children's ambitions and self-control can lead to an increase in critical thinking (Vidal et al., 2023). Furthermore, a study examining the mediating effect of students' cognitive flexibility on the relationship between family communication patterns, the tendency toward critical thinking, and

students' happiness concludes that there is a positive relationship between family communication patterns and both the tendency to think critically and children's happiness (Neymvari, Abolghasemi, & Haghighi, 2023). Zhao and Yang (2021) reach a similar conclusion in their study "Fostering creative thinking in the family: The importance of parenting styles, Thinking Skills and Creativity," stating, "We find that the dimension of parental emotional warmth is positively related to students' creative thinking, while parental rejection and overprotection are negatively associated with creative thinking" (Zhao & Yang, 2021). These studies emphasize the importance of the family environment in influencing the development of critical thinking in young people.

Another important environment that shapes young people is school, which plays a critical role in shaping the cognitive and intellectual development of young people (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). Education systems that promote critical thinking through inquiry-based learning, problem-solving tasks, and collaborative activities foster good critical thinking skills in young people (Lipman, 2003). The quality of learning methods, curricula, and overall school climate are factors that influence the extent to which students can improve their critical thinking skills (Abrami et al., 2008; Paul & Elder, 2006). The study by Van, Denessen, Cillessen, and Meijer (2020) emphasizes the fact that encouraging the development of critical skills depends a lot on teachers and how they value critical thinking.

Cooperation with peers plays an important role in shaping individuals and developing critical thinking skills because it encourages constructive feedback and confronting different perspectives. In school environments where discussion and engagement among peers is promoted, more opportunities are created for them to develop their analytical skills. Studies conclude that group work is useful for creating thinking skills, because ideas are presented in front of others and critically reflected upon (Anderson & Soden, 2001). Further research is needed to explore the mechanisms through which peer interaction influences critical thinking skills in different contexts.

In the age of digital technology, media and social networks play an increasing role in the lives of young people. Constantly receiving information through social platforms affects the perceptions of young people and influences critical thinking. Various studies suggest that exposure to different sources of information, along with the ability to critically assess the credibility of online information, contributes positively to the development of critical thinking skills (Steven, 2012; Zhang, Ning, Wu, Liu, & Li, 2022). The studies by Abbas, Gonzalez-Cacho, Radovanović, Ali, and Rincón (2023) and Shieh and Nasongkhla (2024) conclude that the use of course activities based on social media and participation in social networks are beneficial for university students. Online interaction on these sites offers various opportunities to learn and improve self-control, tolerate and respect the views of others, express emotions in healthy and orderly ways, and think and make decisions critically.

However, researchers have also studied the negative side of exposure to social media, thus assessing the risk of misinformation, which presents a challenge that can hinder critical thinking in the digital sphere. According to Ophir, Nass, and Wagner (2009) social media negatively affects the reduction of mental skills that are used to solve problems or complete tasks. This is because the use of social media interferes with our daily interactions and we fail to focus on one thing only, thus negatively affecting critical thinking skills. While exposure to various sources of information contributes positively to critical thinking, the ability to critically assess the credibility of online content becomes crucial in mitigating potential flaws (Livingstone, 2004).

The literature review highlights that there are multiple impacts from different environments on the critical thinking skills of young people. All these environments intertwine to shape cognitive abilities. For this reason, it is important to understand the relationships between these environments to develop comprehensive strategies aimed at fostering critical thinking skills in young people. Further research is needed to explore the dynamic nature of these influences and identify effective interventions that can improve critical thinking in different environmental contexts. These factors are interrelated and act in synergy. However, based on the studies conducted, it seems that the school environment has a major role in the formation of critical thinking skills. In his study, Wan (2022) suggests that although the school environment is more influential than the family environment in the creation of students' critical thinking, efforts should be made to encourage the educational and family environments to more effectively cultivate

critical thinking skills in young people. Schools provide a structured and formalized environment for cognitive development, so they contribute the most to increasing critical thinking skills. Moreover, young people spend more time in educational institutions in their formative years.

It is already accepted that school plays the main role in the overall development of young people. However, school is part of a broader social reality, and other factors, such as family, media, and peers, directly influence the cognitive development of young people. For this reason, it is necessary to have a comprehensive approach that takes into account the interaction of family, school, society, and the media to better understand the factors that contribute to critical thinking skills in young people.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

In this research, quantitative and qualitative analyses were used, as well as the analysis of secondary data extracted from similar studies. The quantitative method consists of the analysis of a questionnaire that was completed by 260 respondents. The secondary data are the result of the review and in-depth analysis of literature on the identification of problems related to critical thinking and its promotion by social institutions.

3.2. Research Population

This questionnaire was filled out by 260 young people aged 15–30 in urban areas (70%) and rural areas (30%) of Durrës city to be as inclusive as possible. Out of the total, 38% were aged 25–30, 32% were aged 18–25 years, and 29% were aged 15–18 years. Regarding education level, 33% were high school students, 23% were university students, 41% had finished their bachelor's, and 2% were master's students. A total of 14% of the students were from low income families, 81% were from average income families, and 5% were from high income families. The interviewees were chosen randomly. Non-probability purposive sampling was used in this study to randomly select the participants. The analysis of the questionnaires for the selected sample was carried out with a confidence level of 90% and a margin of error of $\pm 5\%$. The formula for calculating the sample size (SS) where the population is finite is as follows:

$$Z = 1.65, p = 0.5, e = 5\%, N = 73000$$

$$SS = \frac{\frac{z^2 \times p(1-p)}{e^2}}{1 + \left(\frac{z^2 \times p(1-p)}{e^2 N}\right)}$$

$$SS = 271$$

The final sample contains information from 260 questionnaires. Any questionnaires that were not sufficiently completed to be part of the analysis were removed from the database.

3.3. Instrument

In this research, the questionnaire was used as a quick, direct method to obtain real-time information from a large number of individuals. Using the questionnaire for data collection in this paper enables the analysis of possible connections between the studied variables and is an attempt to supplement previous studies that have primarily used qualitative methods. The questionnaire consists of six sections. Section I gathers general information about the students (gender, age, place of residence, etc.), Section II collects data on the respondents' assessment of critical thinking skills, Section III gathers data on the role of the family in shaping critical thinking skills, Section IV gathers data on the role of the school in shaping critical thinking skills, Section V gathers data on the assessment of the role of peers in shaping critical thinking, and Section VI gathers data on the assessment of the role of media and social networks in shaping critical thinking skills in young people. The questionnaire contains multiple-choice questions, Likert scale questions, and open-ended questions. The questionnaires were completed in direct communication, but those living far away or who were unable to meet face-to-face filled it in via Google Forms.

3.4. Validity and Reliability Tests

The questions were formulated to be understandable for all respondents, with Likert scale answer options, as well as positive, negative, and filter questions. Special attention was given not only to the structuring of the questions but also to their precise formulation to ensure the answers were valid and beneficial to achieve the main aim.

Reliability was measured by calculating the Cronbach's alpha coefficients, which were found to be higher than 0.7 (the permissible norm), indicating the reliability and internal consistency of the questionnaire. Given that each question represents a variable that can have multiple answers, the answer options for the closed-ended questions were as realistic as possible to obtain the necessary information.

Questionnaire testing: A pilot test was used to increase the reliability and validity of the study instrument. Before the questionnaires were distributed in the field, a pilot test was conducted with 20 high school students. The results of the pilot test showed that the questions were accurately formulated and easy to understand. Questions that were unclear, and from which the necessary information could not be obtained, were discussed and reformulated with field experts and a statistics specialist to ensure clarity. After this process, the questionnaire was distributed to the planned target group of young people.

3.5. Analysis of the Results

The processing and analysis were carried out through SPSS 25.0 and Excel software packages. Data analysis involved descriptive analysis, cross-tabulations, independence tests, correlations between variables, factor analysis, hypothesis construction and testing, analysis of variance (ANOVA), and the construction of multiple regression equations.

4. RESULTS

First, the factorial weights of each variable as well as their reliability coefficients were analyzed. The process used for this assessment refers to the Principal Component Analysis method. Factorial weights must be greater than 0.4 to be part of further analyses, and the reliability coefficient should be greater than 0.7.

Regarding the analysis of the dependent variable (critical thinking skills), all questions underwent further analysis, as their reliability coefficients were greater than 0.7, except for the second question, which has a factorial weight of less than 0.4.

The factorial weights and the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the independent variables were then analyzed and evaluated. Referring to the first independent variable—the influence of the school regarding the development of critical thinking—the factorial weight of the first question is less than 0.4, which was omitted from the analysis, while the other two questions undergo analysis with a reliability coefficient value of 0.530. Regarding the factorial weights of the second independent variable—the influence of family on the development of critical thinking—from the data it was observed that all questions have a factorial weight greater than 0.4, while their reliability coefficient value is 0.359. On the other hand, the factorial weights of the third independent variable—the influence of society on the development of critical thinking—show that, except for the second question, all other questions have a specific weight greater than 0.4, and the alpha value for these questions is 0.425. The last independent variable—the influence of the media on the development of critical thinking—the data related to their factorial weights show values greater than 0.4, and their alpha coefficient is 0.418.

In a summary of the main results of the survey, for the question “How would you rate your level of critical thinking skills?”, 12% rated it low, 54% rated it normal, 28% rated it high, and 5% rated it very high.

For the question “Did your family influence your overall development of critical thinking skills?”, approximately 31% stated that their family influenced them a lot, 22% expressed that their families had little or no influence on their development of critical thinking, 35% reported that the influence of family was at a normal level, and in 12% of cases the influence of the family was extremely important, which shows that the family as the main cell of society still has

an indisputable and permanent influence on young people, indicating its role and necessity, especially today when society and social activities are changing rapidly and, in many dimensions, simultaneously.

After family, society has an extremely important role in the overall development of youth, including attitude and critical thinking. Figure 1 illustrates the perceptions among young people regarding the influence of society and peers on their critical thinking skills. Regarding the question of how society has influenced the development of critical thinking skills, for 40% this influence was reported as average, followed by 38% who stated that the influence of their society on the development of critical thinking skills was low or had no impact at all, and 22% expressed that the impact of society in terms of the development and strengthening of critical thinking was high or even very high.

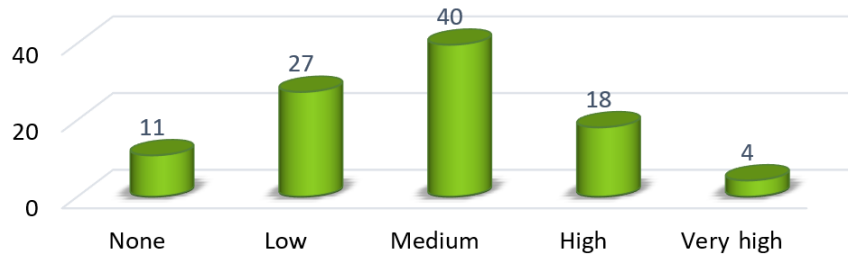


Figure 1. Society's impact on critical thinking development.

Referring to the large and rapid development of information technology, young people were asked if they think that the media and social networks influence their critical thinking skills. For 32% of the respondents, this influence was low or negligible, and for 19% it was high or very high.

The development and strengthening of critical thinking have also been evaluated regarding the impact of educational institutions. Thus, referring to the question "How much has the school and the knowledge gained influenced the development of critical thinking skills?", 54% expressed that the school influenced them a lot and that it continued beyond school life, strengthening and improving critical thinking skills in the social environment as well. For 18%, the school's influence in this regard was low or negligible, and for another 28%, this impact was average.

Before analyzing the hypotheses and research questions, the multicollinearity among the independent variables was assessed. Table 1 presents the correlation coefficients among the variables "School impact," "Society impact," "Family impact," and "Media impact." According to the data, the correlation values are within the allowed limits [-0.7, 0.7], showing that the interaction between them does not affect their relationships with the dependent variables.

Table 1. Multicollinearity between independent variables.

Model	School impact	Family impact	Society impact	Media impact
School impact	1			
Family impact	-0.014	1		
Society impact	0.201**	0.171**	1	
Media impact	0.254**	0.133*	0.404**	1

Note: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Hypothesis: Which environment most influences the growth and development of critical thinking skills?

To analyze this hypothesis, we again refer to the construction of the multiple linear regression equation where we first see the ANOVA analysis. Table 2 presents the result of the multiple regression analysis, which indicates that the overall regression model is significant, suggesting that the predictors (media impact, family impact, school impact and society impact) collectively explain a significant portion of the variance in the dependent variable. The data from this analysis shows that Sig. = 0.000 < 0.10, indicating a significant interaction between them.

Table 2. Multiple regression analysis.

ANOVA ^a					
Model	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Regression	17.376	4	4.344	10.506	0.000 ^b
Residual	101.300	245	0.413		
Total	118.676	249			

Note: a. Dependent variable: Ability to develop critical thinking skills.
b. Predictors: (Constant), media impact, family impact, school impact, society impact.

Table 3. Analysis of the independent variables' Sig. coefficients.

Model ^a	R square	Adjusted R square	T	Sig.
(Constant)	0.146	0.132	4.430	0.000
School impact			3.057	0.002
Family impact			0.487	0.627
Society impact			3.327	0.001
Media impact			1.737	0.084

Note: a. Dependent variable: Ability to develop critical thinking skills.

Table 3 presents the analysis results of the independent variables' significant coefficients. The information above shows that three factors have a great influence on the growth of critical thinking development skills, which are school, society, and the media, due to their respective Sig. values of 0.002, 0.001 and, 0.084, which are smaller than $p = 0.10$. Therefore, the multiple linear regression equation for this variable is:

$$\begin{aligned} & (\text{Ability to develop critical thinking skills}) \\ & = 1.385 + 3.057 (\text{School impact}) + 3.327 (\text{Society impact}) + 0.126 (\text{Media impact}) \end{aligned}$$

The β coefficients of this correlation for each factor are $\beta_1 = 3.057$ for school influence, $\beta_2 = 3.327$ for society influence, and $\beta_3 = 0.126$ for media influence. A comparison of these coefficients shows that the social environment has the greatest influence on the development of critical thinking skills, followed by the influence of school and the media.

To further analyze this attitude, the study carried out a detailed analysis of other social and economic factors to reach accurate conclusions. For this purpose, some research questions were analyzed in addition to the hypotheses.

Research question 1: Does the education level of young people influence the development of critical thinking?

To analyze this question, we refer to the chi-square test of independence by analyzing the Pearson chi-square coefficient. The data presented in Table 4 show that the value of asymptotic significance (2-sided) = 0.280 > 0.10, thus showing that the respondents' education level, which refers to whether they have secondary or higher education, does not necessarily influence the process of their critical thinking toward any kind of injustice they perceive or experience.

Table 4. Test of independence related to critical thinking and the influence of education level.

Chi-square tests			
Model	Value	Df	Asymptotic significance (2-sided)
Pearson chi-square	7.470 ^a	6	0.280
Likelihood ratio	6.877	6	0.332
Linear-by-linear association	0.703	1	0.402
Number of valid cases	254		

Note: ^a 1s (16.7%) have an expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.95.

Research question 2: Does critical thinking depend on the socioeconomic status of the youths' families?

Table 5 presents the test of independence regarding the influence of economic status and critical thinking. The data show that the critical thinking of young people is influenced by their socioeconomic status, a conclusion derived from the fact that the value of asymptotic significance (2-sided) = 0.001 < 0.10 (see Table 4).

Table 5. Test of independence regarding the influence of economic status and critical thinking.

Chi-square tests			
Model	Value	Df	Asymptotic significance (2-sided)
Pearson chi-square	19.702 ^a	4	0.001
Likelihood ratio	15.398	4	0.004
Linear-by-linear association	8.679	1	0.003
N of valid cases	260		

Note: ^a = 3 cells (33.3%) have an expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.65.

5. DISCUSSION

The data analysis in this study examines the factors influencing the development of critical thinking skills in young people. The study hypothesizes which environment has the greatest impact on the growth and development of these skills. The results from the multiple regression analysis demonstrate that factors such as the influence of the school, society, and the media significantly impact the development of critical thinking skills. As in studies carried out by other researchers, school has a slightly greater impact in this direction. However, this does not mean that the other factor (family) has no influence at all, but in this sample and this environment, three factors have the most influence because they mainly change attitude, communication, and life activity as they are the most connected to these environments. Moreover, affirmed in the study by Vidal et al. (2023) the influence of family is indirect, so young people did not perceive it as a direct factor in the cultivation of cognitive skills.

In addition, specific research questions have contributed to the understanding of the influence of other socioeconomic factors on the critical thinking of young people. For example, the results of the chi-square test show that the socioeconomic status of families has a consistent relationship with the critical thinking skills of young people. This suggests that socioeconomic factors, such as the resources and opportunities available to an individual, may influence the development of critical thinking. This result is similar to that in the study by Cheung, Rudowicz, Lang, Yue, and Kwan (2001) which concluded that students from higher-income families have better critical thinking skills than students from lower-income families.

Also, while the hypothesis related to the influence of education level on the development of critical thinking was not confirmed, this combination of results is important to understand the wider context of the influence of the environment on the critical thinking skills of young people.

In conclusion, statistical analyses are important instruments for understanding the influence of the environment on critical thinking skills. The results of this study highlight the need to consider socioeconomic factors, school, society, and the media to improve and develop critical thinking skills in young people. This is a challenge for educators and policymakers to take these factors into account in the design of education policies.

6. CONCLUSION

In summary, the data analysis in this study has yielded some significant findings regarding the impact of the environment on young people's development of critical thinking abilities. The study demonstrated how social factors—such as education, society, and the media—have a big influence on young people's capacity for critical thought. A third of the participants recognized that their families had a noteworthy impact on the formation of critical thinking, while 40% perceived an average influence from society and peers, over 50% of respondents believed that the media and social networks had a moderate to high influence on their critical thinking, and a majority (54%) attributed significant importance to schools.

Social influence emerged as the strongest predictor of critical thinking skills, followed by the influence of schools and the media. The regression equation highlighted their respective coefficients: $\beta_1 = 3.057$ (school impact), $\beta_2 = 3.327$ (society impact), and $\beta_3 = 0.126$ (media impact).

The results reveal that education attainment did not significantly influence critical thinking, as evidenced by a chi-square test result with a p-value > 0.10 .

The results revealed that the socioeconomic status of families has a stable relationship with the critical thinking skills of young people. Socioeconomic status significantly impacted critical thinking skills, as indicated by a chi-square test result with a p-value < 0.10 . This highlights the importance of supporting young people from all walks of life to ensure that they all have the opportunity to develop critical thinking, regardless of social background.

7. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The results of this study are important for understanding and promoting the development of critical thinking skills in young people.

Education Policy Formulation: The study highlights socioeconomic influence, so policymakers should pay particular attention to policies that provide students with equal access to opportunities and resources. Additionally, it should be considered that there are various factors that influence critical thinking, and when formulating educational policies, these factors should be taken into account to ensure that policies are effective and successful.

Curriculum Development: The findings of this study serve to improve the development of curricula that foster the formation of critical thinking skills among students. Educational institutions are crucial in shaping young people, so they should employ practices that promote analytical thinking, problem solving, and critical inquiry. In schools, particular importance should be given to fostering collaboration among peers. Teachers play a key role in enhancing critical thinking skills, so it is crucial that they are trained to support the development of students' abilities. Additionally, it is essential for teachers to possess the tools, resources, and techniques necessary to incorporate critical thinking into teaching.

Parental Support and Involvement: The study results and literature review highlight the family environment as a factor that shapes the critical thinking of young people. Parents should be involved and aware of the importance of encouraging open discussions within the family and addressing issues from different perspectives. Furthermore, parents belonging to a variety of socioeconomic situations have the ability to champion resources and support networks that facilitate fair educational opportunities for their children.

Future Research Directions: The study provides opportunities for more investigation into the complex relationships between environmental influences and the development of critical thinking. Subsequent research endeavors may include longitudinal analyses as a means of evaluating the enduring effects of environmental factors on critical thinking abilities throughout various developmental phases. Furthermore, studies that compare different cultural contexts and educational systems may provide insightful information on which elements of critical thinking are context-specific or universal.

The data from this study emphasize the importance of collaboration among teachers, policymakers, parents, and researchers to help young people develop critical thinking skills. Through the resolution of socioeconomic gaps, encouragement of innovative pedagogy, and cultivation of nurturing educational settings, interested parties can equip the upcoming generation with the necessary abilities to effectively overcome problems and make valuable contributions to their community.

Funding: This study received no specific financial support.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The Ethical Committee of the Aleksandër Moisiu University, Albania has granted approval for this study (Ref. No. 1029).

Transparency: The authors state that the manuscript is honest, truthful, and transparent, that no key aspects of the investigation have been omitted, and that any differences from the study as planned have been clarified. This study followed all writing ethics.

Competing Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Authors' Contributions: Literature review and data collection, M.K. and E.C.; analysis of results, M.K. and R.K.; discussions and implications: M.K., R.K. and E.C. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

REFERENCES

- Abbas, A., Gonzalez-Cacho, T., Radovanović, D., Ali, A., & Rincón, G. B. (2023). Students' use of social media and critical thinking: The mediating effect of engagement in digital literacy and inclusion: Stories, platforms, communities. In (pp. 99-112). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Abrami, P. C., Bernard, R. M., Borokhovski, E., Wade, A., Surkes, M. A., Tamim, R., & Zhang, D. (2008). Instructional interventions affecting critical thinking skills and dispositions: A stage 1 meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, 78(4), 1102-1134. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654308326084>
- Anderson, T., & Soden, R. (2001). Peer interaction and the learning of critical thinking skills. *Psychology Learning & Teaching*, 1(1), 37-40. <https://doi.org/10.2304/plat.2001.1.1.37>
- Benesch, S. (1993). Critical thinking: A learning process for democracy. *TESOL Quarterly*, 27(3), 545-548.
- Cheung, C. K., Rudowicz, E., Lang, G., Yue, X. D., & Kwan, A. S. F. (2001). Critical thinking among university students: Does the family background matter? *College Student Journal*, 35(4), 577-597.
- Dam, T. G., & Volman, M. (2004). Critical thinking as a citizenship competence: Teaching strategies. *Learning and Instruction*, 14(4), 359-379.
- Eccles, J. S., & Roeser, R. W. (2011). Schools as developmental contexts during adolescence. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 21(1), 225-241. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1532-7795.2010.00725.x>
- Ennis, R. H. (2015). Critical thinking: A streamlined conception in the palgrave handbook of critical thinking in higher education. In (pp. 31-47). New York: Palgrave Macmillan US.
- Facione, P. A. (2011). *Measured reasons and critical thinking*. Lillbrae, CA: The California Academic Press.
- Ferrari, G. R. F. (2000). *Plato: The republic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jashari, A. (2013). *Critical thinking in the Albanian school reality*. Paper presented at the 1st Albania International Conference on Education. <http://dspace.epoka.edu.al/handle/1/793>.
- Kant, I. (1992). *An answer to the question: What is enlightenment humphrey, t. translation*. Indianapolis, Indiana, U.S: Hackett Publishing.
- Lipman, M. (2003). Education for critical thinking in M. Davies & R. Barnett (Eds.), *Thinking in education*. In (pp. 205-242). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Livingstone, S. (2004). Media literacy and the challenge of new information and communication technologies. *The Communication Review*, 7(1), 3-14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10714420490280152>
- Mathews, S. R., & Lowe, K. (2011). Classroom environments that foster a disposition for critical thinking. *Learning Environments Research*, 14, 59-73. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10984-011-9082-2>
- Neymvari, N. E., Abolghasemi, S., & Haghighi, T. H. (2023). Analysis of structural equations in the relationship between family communication patterns with tendency to critical thinking and students' happiness with the mediating role of cognitive flexibility in students. *Journal of Adolescent and Youth Psychological Studies*, 4(1), 49-60.
- OECD. (2023). *PISA 2022 results factsheets, Albania: The state of learning and equity in education*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- Ophir, E., Nass, C., & Wagner, A. D. (2009). From the cover: Cognitive control in media multitaskers. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 106(37), 15583. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.0903620106>
- Paul, R., & Elder, L. (2006). *Critical thinking: Learn the tools the best thinkers use*. Hoboken, New Jersey, U.S: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Shieh, C. J., & Nasongkhla, J. (2024). Effects of motivation to use social networking sites on students' media literacy and critical thinking. *Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies*, 14(1), e202404.

- Steven, A. (2012). *The impact of social media to students' critical thinking skills*. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322384141_The_Impact_of_Social_Media_to_Students'_Critical_Thinking_skills
- Teqja, Z., & Dennis, S. (2016). Creative thinking, critical thinking and systemic thinking-key instruments to deeply transform the higher education system in Albania: The case of landscape architecture. *Educational Alternatives*, 14, 543-555.
- UNESCO. (2017). *Albania: Education policy review: Issues and recommendations. Extended report UNESCO digital library*. Retrieved from <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000259245>
- Van, D. Z. P. J., Denessen, E., Cillessen, A. H., & Meijer, P. C. (2020). Fostering critical thinking skills in secondary education to prepare students for university: Teacher perceptions and practices. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, 25(4), 394-419. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13596748.2020.1846313>
- Vavla, L., & Sota, A. (2018). How do Albanian high-school students and teachers perceive the application of the learner-centered approach? *ANGLISTICUM. Journal of the Association-Institute for English Language and American Studies*, 7(4), 10-19. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1239004>
- Vidal, S., Pereira, A., Núñez, J. C., Vallejo, G., Rosendo, D., Miranda, S., . . . Rosário, P. (2023). Critical thinking predictors: The role of family-related and motivational variables. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 49, 101348.
- Wan, Z. H. (2022). What predicts students' critical thinking disposition? A comparison of the roles of classroom and family environments. *Learning Environments Research*, 25(2), 565-580. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10984-021-09381-y>
- Zhang, Z., Ning, M., Wu, Z., Liu, C., & Li, J. (2022). Construction of a competition practice system for robotics engineering based on a competency model. *Computer Applications in Engineering Education*, 30(3), 876-891.
- Zhao, X., & Yang, J. (2021). Fostering creative thinking in the family: The importance of parenting styles. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 41, 100920. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2021.100920>

Views and opinions expressed in this article are the views and opinions of the author(s). The International Journal of Education and Practice shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability, etc., caused in relation to/arising from the use of the content.