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## Developing Critical Thinking Skills for Students at Political Schools in the Mekong Delta Region, Vietnam, in the Digital Era

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### Abstract

*The goal of modern education is to develop global citizens who are capable of mastering and solving problems, particularly through critical thinking skills. This study was conducted with 545 lecturers and students from political schools in the Mekong Delta region of Vietnam, aiming to assess the current state and feasibility of solutions to develop critical thinking. The research method includes dialectical and historical materialism, combined with statistical analysis techniques and sociological surveys. The results show that, in recent years, students' critical thinking skills have improved significantly. Students are increasingly aware of critical thinking as an essential skill, helping them think flexibly and solve problems independently and creatively. However, there are still many challenges in ensuring that all students have the opportunity to develop this skill, which requires specific strategies and curriculum improvements to achieve better results.*

**Keywords:** Critical thinking, students, Mekong Delta, Vietnam.

### Introduction

As Vietnam enters a new era of national advancement, the education and training of officials, civil servants, and public employees face new challenges. Developing critical thinking skills among students at political schools plays a crucial role in enhancing their political resolve, ethical qualities, professional expertise, and vocational skills. These efforts aim to equip officials, civil servants, and public employees to meet the demands of their responsibilities effectively. In his work *"Modifying the Working Style"* (October 1947), President Ho Chi Minh emphasized: "The success or failure of all tasks depends on the competence of cadres. Cadres are the foundation of all work; therefore, training cadres is the foundation of the Party" (Ho Chi Minh, 2011).

Cadres and cadre work have always been critical factors, holding decisive significance for the success of revolutionary endeavors. Deeply understanding President Ho Chi Minh's words, "Cadres are the foundation of all work," the Communist Party of Vietnam has consistently prioritized the construction, training, and development of cadres, considering it a crucial and continuous task. The Party has affirmed: "Achieve fundamental and substantial improvements in the quality and effectiveness of education and training to better meet the demands of national construction and defense, as well as the people's learning needs. Educate Vietnamese individuals to develop comprehensively, unlocking their full potential and creativity; foster a love for family, country, and fellow citizens; live virtuously and work effectively" (Communist Party of Vietnam,

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2013). Additionally, the Party has emphasized: "Develop human resources, particularly high-quality human resources, prioritizing leadership, management, and key sectors, by ensuring substantial, powerful, and comprehensive changes in education and training quality, tied to recruitment, utilization, and talent reward mechanisms" (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021).

Implementing Regulation No. 09-QĐi/TW dated November 13, 2018, issued by the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (12th tenure) regarding the functions, tasks, and organizational structure of provincial and municipal political schools directly under the Central Government (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2018). The Political School of the Mekong Delta region has the function of organizing training and capacity-building programs for grassroots-level leaders and managers within the political system, as well as local officials and civil servants, in political theory, administration, and the Party's guidelines, resolutions, and directives. The school also provides education on the policies and laws of the State, specialized knowledge, and professional skills related to Party-building, local government, the Fatherland Front, and other political and social organizations. Additionally, it offers training in legal and state administrative management knowledge and other relevant fields.

Critical thinking is an essential skill and plays a crucial role in training cadres who are well-rounded, capable of critical thinking, and able to meet the increasing demands of society. This is an urgent requirement of the Communist Party of Vietnam and the State of Vietnam. Currently, Vietnam is entering a new era, an era of national rejuvenation, where the development of e-Government is being promoted, moving towards a digital government to manage the nation effectively. This includes efficient and effective state governance, which serves as a driving force for fundamental and profound changes in all aspects of social life, including the democratization process and the practice of democracy, creating equal opportunities for citizens to participate in critical debates on the nation's most important policies, from the drafting stage to decision-making and implementation. To fulfill this responsibility and exercise the right to engage in critical thinking, each individual must have a certain level of understanding about the social, national, and global situation. They must possess a culture of debate, be willing to listen, and contribute valid, scientifically-based opinions. This is even more important and necessary for officials—the main force of the country. Particularly for students at political schools, this is an essential task that cannot be overlooked in preparing individuals who are both red and professional, possessing both virtues and skills, and confident enough to participate in building the country.

The system of Political Schools in Vietnam in general, and the Political School of the Mekong Delta region in particular, has been continuously innovating the content, methods, and forms of teaching in order to improve the quality and effectiveness of training and capacity-building. These schools not only provide comprehensive and in-depth knowledge for students but also focus on equipping them with dialectical thinking methods, encouraging multidimensional approaches to problems. Students are taught to ask probing questions, re-examine issues from different angles, and discover hidden aspects, leading to more creative solutions. In other words, they must develop critical thinking skills to overcome passive, one-dimensional approaches.

However, the development of scientific critical thinking among a segment of students in political schools in the Mekong Delta region has not yet fully met the requirements. Their ability to critically analyze and self-reflect on theoretical and practical issues is not well-developed. The distinction between right and wrong is often unclear, and scientific critique has not yet become a direct, regular necessity for students to address complex theoretical and practical problems.

Critical thinking skills are still somewhat confused, lacking clear positions, viewpoints, or stances. On the other hand, some students are hesitant to engage in scientific critique on issues related to academic subjects or practical work. These manifestations indicate that the abilities of some students do not meet the requirements and are negatively affecting their practical work, such as: receiving and filtering information, assessing and handling problematic real-life situations, public speaking, debating, and one-dimensional thinking.

From the practical experience of training and capacity-building at political schools in the Mekong Delta region, as well as the philosophy of education and future educational trends, we recognize that the "Development of Critical Thinking Skills for Students of Political Schools in the Mekong Delta Region, Vietnam in the Digital Age" is essential.

## **Research Methodology**

**Theoretical Foundation:** The theory of Marxism-Leninism, the thought of Ho Chi Minh; the viewpoints and policies of the Communist Party of Vietnam on thinking and scientific critical thinking. It also draws on the research results published by both domestic and international scholars related to the study.

**Practical Foundation:** The practical development of scientific critical thinking among students of political schools in the Mekong Delta region, Vietnam, through survey data and actual investigations at the political schools in the region, as well as the directives and resolutions from the Party Committees and the school administrations of the political schools in the Mekong Delta region.

**Research Methods:** The study is based on the methodological foundations of dialectical and historical materialism. It employs specific methods such as: analysis and synthesis, system and structure, logic and history, comparison, statistics, sociological surveys, interviews, and data processing... to clarify the research issues.

The study used questionnaires to collect opinions of party members on the current state of critical thinking capacity of political school students in the Mekong Delta region, Vietnam in recent times, the necessity and feasibility of proposed solutions. The author built a survey form. The survey form with 545 forms for lecturers and students of political school in the Mekong Delta region, Vietnam. The results obtained 545 forms from lecturers and students that were valid, fully answering the criteria. To analyze and synthesize the survey data, the author used the method of data processing using statistical mathematics and SPSS software.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The study of "thinking" has always been one of the central issues in philosophy. Throughout the development of the history of philosophy, thinkers have examined the formation, nature, as well as the characteristics and laws governing the movement of "thinking." Socrates (469 - 399 BC), a philosopher and exemplary citizen of ancient Athens, laid the foundation for oratory based on a system of dialogue questions and challenges posed to the authorities regarding the correctness of their policies.

In Hegel's philosophy, "thinking" is the subject of logic: "For Hegel, the concept of thinking fundamentally integrates the basic principles characteristic of his entire philosophical system, such as the principle of the absolute power of thought (reason), the principle of the identity between thought and existence, the principle of development, the principle of system, the

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principle of history, etc." (Nguyễn Trọng Chuẩn, 2006).

The classical theorists of Marxism-Leninism also addressed the issue of "thinking" in their works, such as *Dialectics of Nature and Anti-Dühring* by F. Engels (1873 - 1886) (C. Marx and F. Engels, 1994); *Philosophical Notebooks* by V.I. Lenin (1914 - 1915) (V.I. Lenin, 1981). In these works, the classical theorists of Marxism-Leninism pointed out the nature and characteristics of "thinking" and affirmed that its movement and development occur in parallel with the movement and development of practice. As F. Engels stated: "The theoretical thinking of each era, including our era, is a historical product that takes on very different forms in different eras and therefore has very different content" (C. Marx and F. Engels, 1994).

According to John Dewey (2013), in his book *How We Think*, emphasizes that the development of human "thinking" can be achieved "through the development of creativity, curiosity, and the way of asking questions." Therefore, according to him, it is necessary to "create an environment that stimulates creative thinking".

Tim Bayne (2013), in his book *Introduction to Thinking*, delves into issues such as: "What is thinking?", "The ethics of thinking," "Mistaken thinking, as well as the limitations of thinking." The books by Tony Buzan (2007 - 2017), such as *Mind Maps at Work* (Tony Buzan, 2007, Mind Maps at Work, Labor Publishing House), *Modern Mind Mapping for Smarter Thinking* (Tony Buzan, 2016), *Embracing Change: The Basic Steps to Building Your Future Starting Today* (Tony Buzan, 2017), etc., address the issue of "thinking" and consider mind mapping as an effective method to help individuals develop their intellect to understand, master, and change their own lives.

John Naisbitt, in his book *Mindset of the Future: 11 Ways of Thinking That Will Change the Way We See and Create the Future* (John Naisbitt, 2009), helps human thinking go beyond its limits, envision, and predict accurately what will happen in the future. The book views critical thinking as a positive and indispensable aspect of modern thinking.

According to Richard Paul and Linda Elder, the authors of the *Critical Thinking Handbook: Concepts and Tools*, they argue that: "Critical thinking is the art of analyzing and evaluating thinking with the aim of improving it" (Richard Paul - Linda Elder, 2012). This means that the thinking model – on any topic, issue, or content – is where the thinker improves the quality of their thinking by skillfully controlling the existing foundational structures of thought and applying standards of intellectual action to the thinking process. According to Michael Michalko: "Critical thinking is the ability and action to understand and evaluate the data gathered through observation, communication, media, and debate" (Michael Michalko, 2006).

Professor Russell Brooker summarized the historical origins of the concept of critical thinking in the article "On the Concept of Critical Thinking" (R. Brooker, 2012). At the same time, the author also outlined the basic skills, processes, principles, and tendencies of critical thinking. This study affirms that critical thinking is an important factor in all professional fields and scientific disciplines.

Helga Nowotny, Peter Scott, and Michael Gibbons raise new issues and ideas of "rethinking science," reflecting a profound critical spirit (Helga Nowotny - Peter Scott - Michael Gibbons, 2017). P. Darrulat, in his article "Critique for Development" (P. Darrulat, 2013), argues that: "One of the many virtues of science is nurturing critical thinking. However, over the past three centuries, humanity has come to recognize the role of critical thinking, with the author particularly emphasizing that "science must be a training ground for intellect and ethical

awareness. Young people must "face their future with intellect and a sense of responsibility.

According to Le Tan Huynh Cam Giang (2011) in the article "Critical Thinking," the word "critical" is an adjective used to describe "critique". It does not mean negative opposition, but rather making an evaluation or raising questions based on consideration and discussion; or analyzing the assumptions and quality of the issue to reach a reasonable level of reliability; or making a judgment based on a multi-dimensional perspective of the object or phenomenon under consideration.

When it comes to thinking skills, we are talking about thinking methods. Thinking methods play an important role in cognition, which is the way, the path to approach and study the object, which has a great influence on the results of thinking. Scientific thinking methods often bring correct thinking results and vice versa. Because thinking methods are a manifestation of thinking capacity, if the thinking method is outdated and unscientific, there will be no ability to argue in thinking. Therefore, critical thinking cannot develop without scientific thinking methods. So what is the method (skill) of critical thinking? According to Phan Thi Thanh Hoi and Le Thanh Oai, "Critical thinking skills are a series of activities performed skillfully by individuals to analyze information, make arguments to prove a problem, opinion, or viewpoint, thereby convincing the listener to see the problem from a different perspective" (Phan Thi Thanh Hoi and Le Thanh Oai, 2020).

According to Facione, critical thinking is related to many core skills such as: Interpretation skills: The ability to categorize and clarify the meaning of situations, topics, or data; Analysis skills: The ability to check the accuracy of ideas, identify causes and goals; Inference and judgment skills: Making inferences, searching for evidence, proposing a reasonable and persuasive conclusion or offering an alternative to a rejected result; Evaluation skills: The ability to assess the reliability of statements and evaluate the quality of arguments; Explanation skills: Demonstrating results, arguing about processes, and debating presented conclusions; Self-regulation skills: Self-assessment and correction (Facione, 2015). F. Engels pointed out: "It is not nature alone, in its natural form, but rather the transformation of nature by humans that is the most fundamental and direct basis of human thinking" (C. Marx and F. Engels, 2004).

In the 21st century, the goal of lifelong learning requires individuals to continually enhance their critical thinking skills in any educational system. Critical thinking plays an essential role in helping individuals gain profound and correct knowledge and understanding. Additionally, critical thinking helps individuals develop knowledge construction abilities, diverse skills, and good thinking to be able to grasp and manage knowledge, adapting to the changes in society. Thus, it can be seen that critical thinking is of utmost importance for any educational achievement and is regarded as a powerful tool for the goal of lifelong learning. Critical thinking helps individuals move beyond stereotypical thinking, habits, and traditions that have shaped their mindset; it drives them toward new ideas, breaking free from the barriers of prejudice; exploring and discovering new concepts and values of a problem; fostering an attitude of openness to new ideas and progress in thought and action; and being conscious of viewing all problems from a new perspective, yielding new results and stimulating creativity.

Critical thinking helps people think about a problem in many different directions with different solutions; the ability to analyze and evaluate information and events; a clearer awareness of listening and respecting other people's opinions when debating; being ready to accept objective truths, listen to opinions different from one's own and try to understand the nature of the problem before drawing conclusions; overcoming the state of one-sided, one-sided, subjective, and

voluntaristic perception of problems; thinking to solve problems by carefully examining all angles and aspects, giving many different options and choosing the optimal option with solid arguments. Critical thinking helps people have an independent thinking method, see the limitations and mistakes that are easy to make in their thinking process, thereby making optimal judgments and judgments; having positive thoughts, minimizing the psychological state of sadness, disappointment, and loss of confidence; Discover your own inherent potential, create motivation to surpass yourself, assert yourself, form a self-reliant, independent and creative personality; make efforts to update and filter necessary, valuable and useful information for yourself; improve your ability to access and process information; present problems creatively; present arguments clearly; enhance your ability to think in an open, clear, trustworthy, and unhurried way; easily integrate into groups and communities.

Critical thinking, moreover, becomes a driving force for societal development, holding immense value that determines the success or failure of social organizations and the progress of humanity. A society with critical thinking is a developing society, one that can avoid risks, promote improvements to the old, and create new ideas. Critical thinking helps individuals solve problems in a reasonable and justifiable manner; it inherits values from old perspectives while forming new viewpoints aimed at transforming perception and action in practice; it encourages proactivity, awareness, and demonstrates precision, thoroughness, and evidence-based reasoning, enhancing the effectiveness of social activities; it seeks the right, most effective path to reach the truth; discovers mistakes; and cultivates the method of dialectical thinking.

The critical thinking ability of students in political schools is the capacity to access, identify, search for data, compare, and analyze information in order to master specialized knowledge; to quickly detect and handle emerging situations during study and work; and the ability to critique, self-critique, self-adjust, and forecast in order to achieve high results. To develop critical thinking, students need: a broad and deep scientific knowledge base; scientific belief, determination, and resilience; and scientific thinking methods. Accordingly, it is necessary to improve the capacity to receive information; enhance the ability to process information; increase the capacity to detect new issues; improve the ability to apply acquired knowledge into practical work; practice leadership and management skills in the construction of the Party, government, the Fatherland Front, and political-social organizations to enhance leadership and practical management abilities. Enhancing critical thinking ability is a process where the subject actively, proactively, and creatively identifies, detects, and evaluates the issues being analyzed, enhancing the components of critical thinking. It brings critical thinking from critique and self-adjustment to forecasting, orientation, and motivation to achieve higher demands in the cognitive process, in order to improve the quality and effectiveness of thinking.

Thus, according to us, critical thinking can be understood as a form of thinking in which the subject of cognition is able to either negate or affirm a cognitive result by reconsidering a situation or issue from the subject's perspective or standpoint, based on the active, skillful, and creative application of certain knowledge and methods.

## **Results and Discussion**

In recent years, under the leadership and direction of the Party Committee, the Board of Directors of the school, the coordination between departments, faculties and teachers, the critical thinking ability of students of the Mekong Delta Political School, Vietnam has had many positive changes, contributing significantly to the innovation and improvement of the quality of education and training. Most students have more independent and creative thinking and actively research in

their studies. Students are enthusiastic in expressing their opinions in class as well as in debating with their classmates and lecturers. Students have high self-study and self-research capacity, which is reflected in their practical writings and essays for each section; they have the skills to receive and select information, and the ability to process diverse and multi-dimensional information from current practical life issues. Students have gradually improved their political theory knowledge, applied theoretical knowledge into practice, and their ability to process information in their studies has increased day by day. Most students have been able to identify and handle situations related to the lesson content. Many students always have a positive attitude in class and discussion by asking questions to the lecturer; and participating in answering questions raised by the lecturer and fellow students, contributing to making lectures and classes more effective.

Students have sufficient qualifications, professional capacity, and practical sensitivity to meet the requirements of the new situation. In recent years, the knowledge level of students in political schools has continuously improved. They are equipped with a comprehensive knowledge system of Marxism-Leninism, Ho Chi Minh thought, the Party's viewpoints, the State's guidelines, policies, and laws, and have in-depth specialized knowledge, as well as interdisciplinary knowledge. Such relatively comprehensive knowledge is a necessary condition to create an important foundation for the process of developing critical thinking, the ability to receive information with well-founded and reasoned thinking; the ability to process information; improve the ability to discover new problems in information; the ability to refute the results of another thinking process to re-determine the accuracy of information; improve the ability to skillfully and fluently use both content and thinking methods to discover and have good methods to handle problems in practical work.

Recognizing the role of "critical thinking" as a lever for transforming national education into an advanced education system, the Communist Party of Vietnam and the Vietnamese State have consistently made efforts to introduce "Critical Thinking" into the Party schools through strategies for innovating teaching and learning, encouraging a learner-centered approach. The current teaching goals aim at training "knowledgeable cadres." Therefore, training and development in Party schools are always updated and innovative, requiring teachers to use active methods, abandoning the passive approach of "teachers lecture, students listen"; emphasizing and promoting a learner-centered approach; empowering learners with the right to "autonomy in learning," cultivating skills in "self-study," "individual work," "group work"; researching curricula, exam formats, and assessment methods that stimulate learners' creativity, etc. Ultimately, the goal is to produce cadres with critical thinking.

In terms of cognitive capacity, students at political schools in the Mekong Delta have initially recognized the basic capacities they need to equip themselves with to serve their work, study, research, and problem solving. Recently, the critical thinking capacity of students at Party schools has had positive changes. According to a survey of 545 people at political schools in the Mekong Delta, 94% of respondents said that students have begun to approach and have had positive changes in their awareness of critical thinking. Most students at Party schools understand that critical thinking includes commenting and evaluating with reason. This is also the most common understanding of critical thinking - reviewing, analyzing, and evaluating based on scientific basis and reliable evidence. In addition, some students consider critical thinking as contributing ideas to others; some understand it as identifying and refuting others' mistakes; or simply arguing against others' opinions. These perceptions change according to the level of understanding and life experience that students have accumulated. This shows that students in Party schools are

beginning to pay more attention and desire for an environment that fosters critical thinking, a classroom atmosphere that encourages this type of thinking. This is a legitimate and appropriate need that can meet the needs of modern education. These general perceptions of critical thinking play an important role in developing their own critical thinking skills.

According to the survey results at political schools in the Mekong Delta region, the majority of students define critical thinking as the ability to think in multiple directions when faced with a problem or situation that needs resolution, in order to provide an accurate and objective assessment of the issue. Many students also perceive it as the ability to apply knowledge and experience to proactively identify, analyze, reason, and evaluate a particular problem based on certain standards before drawing a conclusion or making a decision to effectively address the issue at hand. Others view critical thinking as the ability to analyze and synthesize knowledge to grasp specialized knowledge, which then allows them to make accurate assessments of problems that arise in their studies and work. From another perspective, many students consider the critical thinking ability of political school students to be the capacity for debate to defend their opinions and viewpoints against those of individuals or groups. In general, although students understand it from different angles and perspectives, they all agree on one common point: they understand the critical thinking ability of political school students as the ability to think positively, multidimensionally, and to apply knowledge in analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating issues and situations that arise during their studies and in practical situations.

According to the survey results at political schools in the Mekong Delta region, 95% of respondents reported having self-learning and self-research abilities; problem-solving and creativity skills; critical thinking abilities, with the capacity to deeply reflect in order to master political theory knowledge, going beyond pre-existing thoughts to develop independent thinking. Additionally, 97% of respondents reported having the ability to identify and analyze problems that arise during their studies, research, and work; the ability to think positively and multidimensionally based on respecting and listening to others' opinions, identifying limitations, and overcoming biases and dogmas in political theory study and research. These are abilities to propose new and reasonable ideas during the learning process. Students themselves have also recognized these as core competencies that a political leader must equip themselves with. This is a key factor influencing the effectiveness of developing critical thinking skills for students at political schools in the Mekong Delta region.

According to the survey results at political schools in the Mekong Delta region, 97% of respondents reported that there has been a shift in awareness, including changes in the approach, identification, discovery of problems, data collection, comparison, analysis, and affirmation of the scientific and revolutionary nature of Marxism-Leninism, Ho Chi Minh's thought, the Party's viewpoints, and the State's policies and laws. This shift also involves the ability to critically evaluate, self-critique, and independently research and study political theory subjects, contributing to the acquisition of knowledge to serve practical activities.

Students have also recognized the role and importance of critical thinking skills in their professional development. According to the survey results at political schools in the Mekong Delta region, 88% of respondents stated that critical thinking skills play an important role for political school students. These skills not only enable students to observe, but also help them develop logical thinking, independent thinking, autonomy, creativity, self-criticism, and the ability to critically assess opinions on issues that arise in both their personal and professional lives, ultimately enhancing work efficiency.

By correctly recognizing the role and importance of critical thinking skills in their studies and professional careers, students at political schools in the Mekong Delta region have started to pay attention to the study of Marxism-Leninism, Ho Chi Minh's thoughts, the viewpoints of the Communist Party of Vietnam, as well as the guidelines, policies, and laws of the Vietnamese State. They have also focused on gaining in-depth specialized knowledge and interdisciplinary knowledge, and understanding the requirements they must meet to serve their work. This is a positive sign, as it shows that political school students are becoming more aware of the characteristics and professional requirements of their field. As a result, they are proactively and actively working on developing, nurturing, and honing the necessary skills for their professional careers.

According to the survey results from political schools in the Mekong Delta region, regarding the development of "information reception capacity," "information processing capacity," "ability to detect new problems in information," and "ability to evaluate the accuracy of information," 95% of respondents believe that political school students possess these capabilities. Students access information from various sources, which may come from instructors or be self-updated and researched during their study, research, and practical experience. In the classroom, students have made significant improvements in quickly and accurately identifying opinions and information. They have demonstrated independent thinking, creativity, and especially the ability to detect new issues in the information they receive. Students are no longer passively receiving information and analyzing it rigidly and methodically. Instead, they exhibit creativity by combining cognitive methods and scientific research to identify new issues in the information. This is evident in their creative search for new ideas during presentations and discussions, where they analyze and present convincing arguments to support their new insights. They have learned to apply theoretical knowledge to solve specific practical situations in life and their careers, enabling them to discover new information and process it flexibly and reasonably for high effectiveness.

The ability to detect new problems in information is always an important trait that lays the foundation for the development of students' creative abilities. Actively studying subjects such as Marxism-Leninism, Ho Chi Minh Thought, the viewpoints of the Communist Party of Vietnam, the Party's lines, and the State's policies and laws, etc., equips students with a dialectical, scientific thinking method based on materialist standpoints. From there, students begin to form objective, comprehensive, historical-specific principles, as well as a unity between theory and practice in their thinking when receiving information. This has significant implications in guiding and determining the accuracy of information, as well as detecting errors and contradictions in the information received. At the same time, students also refute malicious and harmful information from hostile forces, contributing to defending the path to socialism in Vietnam.

In addition to the achievements in improving the critical thinking capacity of students of the Mekong Delta Political School, it is also necessary to frankly acknowledge that there are still some limitations: the ability to identify and detect problems is not quick, the analysis and assessment of the situation is not thorough, the information is not updated regularly, the scientific critical thinking of students is still slow and uneven. The ability to identify and detect problems of students is not high. Most students are still limited in the ability to detect and resolve conflicts when receiving information. When accessing multi-dimensional information sources, many students still lack orientation. Therefore, in receiving and evaluating information, there is a lack of objectivity and comprehensiveness; there is no connection between theory and practice; there

are many difficulties and confusion in distinguishing the truth and falsehood of information; there are many difficulties and confusions in speaking up, fear of making mistakes in writing articles, fear of scientific debate, the mentality of knowing but not saying exists in many students, this also greatly affects the improvement of critical thinking capacity. Therefore, in many classes, one-way, passive learning still occurs. The number of students speaking in class is still small; or if they do speak, they only answer by quoting what is written in the textbook.

Due to passive knowledge acquisition, or due to lack of careful preparation of necessary professional knowledge, lack of self-confidence, often have a fearful mentality. Therefore, they do not want and do not dare to debate, express their opinions and views. Some students have limited qualifications and moreover, to be safe, they often do not want to delve into complex theoretical and practical issues. Because their viewpoints are "skewed" with theory, they are afraid and afraid of being "labeled", scrutinized, and implicated. With the mentality of being afraid of touching, afraid of saying wrong things, many students have applied empty theory, without analyzing and explaining. In particular, there is no clear direction in the relationship and application of the students' responsibilities in the struggle and criticism of wrong viewpoints, denying the scientific and revolutionary nature of Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh thought - the ideological foundation and guideline for the Party's actions.

Due to the influence of small-scale farming thinking, along with the accumulation and lack of practical experience, limitations in life experience, understanding of the profession, especially the lack of political theory knowledge, leading to a gap in the level of awareness, professional capacity, practical experience, life experience, understanding as well as political courage, scientific critical thinking capacity of students in political schools in the Mekong Delta today. This is a subjective cause, hindering the development of scientific critical thinking of students. That makes the development of their scientific critical thinking fall into passivity, fear of collision, little criticism, criticism, fear of "discovering" new things, which is very difficult to overcome.

The awareness and self-awareness of many students about the value, meaning and importance of self-study and self-development of scientific critical thinking are still limited. Some young students are even indifferent to their self-study and research, are afraid to learn, have a receptive spirit, lack the will to overcome difficulties and rise up, they are passive in receiving new knowledge, and do not develop their scientific critical thinking.

One of the reasons for the weakness of a number of students in political schools is that they lack a solid foundation of political theory knowledge, thus lacking confidence and decisiveness, as well as in resolving social relationships and other professional activities. On the other hand, some students are influenced by empirical thinking, falling into subjectivity and voluntarism; they pay little attention to and improve their ability to analyze, evaluate, and criticize professional and occupational content, so they do not have the conditions to develop their scientific critical thinking ability.

Thus, analyzing and clarifying the causes of the current state of scientific critical thinking development of students in political schools in the Mekong Delta region not only provides a general, colorful picture of students in political schools, but also serves as a scientific basis for identifying contradictions and proposing solutions to develop their scientific critical thinking.

Based on the content, characteristics and comparison with the results of the investigation and survey of the current status of the development of scientific critical thinking of students in

political schools in the Mekong Delta region, identifying the contradictions and issues raised is one of the important theoretical and practical bases to stimulate the development of scientific critical thinking of students. Initially, we can summarize some of the main contradictions in the development of scientific critical thinking of students in political schools in the Mekong Delta region as follows: The contradiction between the Party's requirement for innovation in thinking and the incomplete and in-depth awareness of the necessity of developing scientific critical thinking of students in political schools in the Mekong Delta region today; The contradiction between the requirement for innovation in programs, content, forms, and teaching methods in political schools in the Mekong Delta region and the limitations and inadequacies in improving the quality of intermediate political theory training today; The contradiction between the requirement to improve political theory knowledge to improve the quality of intermediate political theory training and their lack of this knowledge; The contradiction between the requirement to build a democratic environment in learning, scientific research, and working with the existing problems and unfavorable impacts on the development of scientific critical thinking of students in political schools in the Mekong Delta today; The contradiction between the requirement to improve the positivity and self-awareness of students in political schools in the Mekong Delta with the limitations and shortcomings in their self-study and self-development of scientific critical thinking.

Party schools play an important role in building the most common scientific worldview and methodology in cognitive and practical activities for learners, aiming to train people with enough capacity to master, adapt and solve problems of the new era. That ability to master requires necessary thinking abilities, in which critical thinking is one of the most important thinking abilities of cadres in the 21st century. For students, especially students in Party schools, during the learning process as well as after graduation, students not only work with machines and numbers but also work directly with people. Therefore, students need critical thinking. To meet that requirement, it is necessary to synchronously implement a number of measures to develop the critical thinking ability of students at the Mekong Delta Political School, Vietnam today.

### **Firstly, raising awareness and promoting the role of stakeholders involved in enhancing the critical thinking abilities of students at the Political School:**

The Party Committee, the school administration, as well as the departments, faculties, teachers, and students must thoroughly understand the importance of renewing the content and programs for political theory education and training for the Party and the State's subjects. This includes understanding and implementing the Party's resolutions and directives on building a cadre force with the necessary qualities, capabilities, and prestige to meet the demands of their tasks; resolutions on strengthening and renewing the Party and the political system to ensure their integrity and strength, in line with the current context; as well as the resolutions from local authorities about improving the quality of human resources in the public sector, etc. Based on these, the school should specifically adapt these resolutions to create practical, appropriate, and effective programs and action plans, fostering a strong transformation in awareness and action.

The stakeholders within the school should regularly collaborate to identify and address weaknesses and shortcomings in education and training, focusing leadership and direction on resolving these limitations. Specific responsibilities should be assigned to individual staff members for monitoring and overseeing the renewal and enhancement of teaching quality for students. Through this, the school aims to foster a high level of commitment, motivation, and responsibility among teachers in imparting knowledge and guiding students on proper, effective

## **Second, innovate the content, program, and method of teaching political theory to students**

The school continues to lead and direct specialized departments to proactively select teaching content suitable for learners. Specifically identify inappropriate content to reduce, thereby adding necessary content suitable for learners. Determine program content according to three groups of learners: learners who are cadres and civil servants of communes, wards, and towns; learners who are cadres and civil servants of district-level agencies; departments and offices of provincial agencies; learners in the professional fields - education, health; learners who are cadres of production - business units. Develop lecture outlines associated with each class (classes of provincial departments and agencies; classes of districts - cities, classes of communes, wards, and towns, classes for specialized and specific sectors...), develop specific plans for discussion hours. Clearly define the purpose and requirements of each lecture; the key parts of the lecture; The content that students study by themselves. On that basis, the lecturer prepares detailed lesson plans for each lesson, suitable for each class. Develop lesson plans and specific plans for class discussion sessions, ensuring the effectiveness of the discussion hours, promoting students' ability to solve situations and handle situations. Develop a system of situational exercises, a system of questions for each lesson and specific instructions so that students can solve situations themselves based on the theory they have learned; combine traditional presentation methods with active and modern teaching methods, overcome the situation of one-way, passive transmission, fear of criticism, fear of objection; stimulate the development of critical thinking.

Enhance practical skills, develop the ability to discover new problems. This skill helps students not only passively absorb knowledge but also actively ask questions and explore issues that have not been mentioned or are unclear. Problem-based learning methods create learning situations with real-life problems that require students to analyze and discover unclear aspects.

Questioning techniques, Train students to use tools such as "5 Whys" or "SCAMPER" to ask deeper questions from the information provided. In political theory, students can analyze a social policy, thereby finding potential problems such as fairness and implementation effectiveness.

Develop the ability to evaluate the accuracy of information. This is a very important skill in the digital age, when students are faced with information from many unreliable sources. Teaches source verification methods, using principles of checking the reliability of sources, such as checking the author, publication date, citation, and information target.

Analyzes real-life examples, asking students to evaluate the accuracy of articles or information from social media. Practices analyzing articles, asking students to analyze content from two conflicting sources and draw conclusions based on evidence.

Training critical thinking through real-life situations. Putting students in real-life situations helps them apply critical thinking more effectively. Building real-life situations, case studies are built on current events related to the field of study, for example: New policies in the Mekong Delta. The impact of climate change on local economic development. Organizing group discussions where students have to present different perspectives and defend their opinions based on the information analyzed. Raising awareness and application in teaching, students need to understand the role of critical thinking not only in learning but also in real-life situations. Integrating critical thinking into subjects, for example: In the subject of Political Theory, encourage students to

analyze the reasons for the success or failure of a particular policy. Organizing seminars, inviting experts to guide students on how to apply critical thinking to analysis and decision making.

### **Third, improve the professional qualifications, critical thinking ability, and sense of responsibility for lecturers**

The school needs to innovate the training and fostering of lecturers, sending lecturers to study to improve their professional qualifications and skills. At the same time, send teachers to long-term field trips to have more practical experiences to put into lectures, making the lectures rich, diverse, and attractive, contributing to stimulating students' ability to actively learn. Lecturers need to further strengthen the training of dialectical materialist methodological principles for students such as: comprehensive principle; historical-specific principle; development principle... Develop logical thinking capacity for students. These principles are the scientific basis, the foundation for improving thinking in general, and critical thinking in particular. Lecturers need to skillfully combine traditional and modern teaching methods in the teaching process. Using active methods will make the class and discussion hours more effective and exciting, promoting the initiative of learners in receiving, processing and analyzing information. From there, gradually forming their ability to debate. In addition, teachers need to raise their sense of responsibility in teaching, be aware of the position and role of debate, and at the same time raise their awareness in cultivating and practicing the principles, dialectical materialism methodology, and logical thinking as the basis for critical thinking. Only by being aware of the role of critical thinking, will teachers be aware of their responsibility in improving students' critical thinking ability.

### **Fourth, improve students' awareness of self-study, self-training, and self-cultivation of critical thinking capacity.**

The main subject of improving this critical thinking is the student himself. No matter how hard other educational subjects try, if the student himself does not want to, is not proactive, and does not realize the practical significance of the need to improve critical thinking, the process of improving their critical thinking will not be effective. Therefore, it is necessary to improve students' awareness of basic understanding of critical thinking, the position and role of critical thinking, and the significance of improving students' critical thinking capacity. Overcome the situation of thinking that studying intermediate political theory is to standardize degrees. Only when the main cognitive subject realizes the role of critical thinking and theoretical learning, can they be active in learning and form critical thinking skills in learning. Strong political will is demonstrated in the ability to independently decide one's attitude and actions, not to change one's viewpoints, policies, strategies, and tactics due to external pressure; in flexibility in tactics, attitudes, and the ability to handle complex situations; in the will and ability to fight against enemy attacks; in the sensitivity to new things and the ability to self-innovate. Improving political will for students aims to train students to have a stance and courage in detecting, analyzing, and resolving situations and conflicts that arise in their studies; in knowing how to argue tightly and logically based on the laws of logical thinking, and in courageously fighting for new, correct, and scientific viewpoints.

Learners need to develop the right motivation and attitude towards learning. Motivation and attitude are expressed in the awareness of the learner's needs and benefits, in the attitude towards the cognitive process, towards the content of the problem being studied and practiced, and in the

learner's interest in the subject. Only when learners are self-aware and proactive in acquiring knowledge and applying that knowledge to practical work and life, can they truly improve their level and ability of critical thinking. Each learner needs to be regularly, actively, proactively, and creatively self-study, self-research, and self-discovery to set up situations related to their own work. The positivity, self-awareness, proactiveness, and creativity of learners in learning and practical activities are the core to move towards scientific thinking, logical thinking, making thinking flexible and creative. From there, develop skills, link knowledge to solve problems. To help students improve their ability to think independently, autonomously, and creatively in their studies, schools must innovate their content, programs, and teaching methods; innovate their student management, testing, and learning outcome assessment. These are the stimulants and motivations that motivate students to study.

In addition, students themselves must voluntarily practice in all aspects, cultivate knowledge, enhance sense of responsibility, and revolutionary ethics through practical activities. The improvement of political capacity and intellectual level must first be decided by the students themselves. Each student must voluntarily improve his/her political capacity and intellectual level through the path of voluntary study, practice, and self-cultivation in all aspects; in which, it is necessary to grasp the principle of self-education. Because the method of self-education always makes people more confident, the responsibility to strive is clearer; promoting the role of self-education is an effective measure to improve the intellectual level of each student. This is the process of creating motivation, promoting each student to actively cultivate knowledge and scientific thinking methods; regularly update new information and knowledge, especially ideological and theoretical information; closely follow and delve into practice to discover newly arising issues, and summarize experiences from practice. With the awareness of self-education, students will always proactively grasp and process information to make the right decisions and organize effective implementation together; at the same time, actively and proactively participate in the fight and criticize wrong and hostile points. In addition, it is necessary to constantly build and improve the moral qualities and lifestyle of students through lectures, because only good moral qualities have a solid foundation to scientifically and correctly criticize the information received. Raise students' self-awareness in reading and researching textbooks and reference materials on their own.

## **Conclusion**

Students of political schools in the Mekong Delta are current leaders and managers, reserve sources of the Party, government, and people's organizations at all levels in the province, holding important positions in the work of the Party, government, and organizations. With their positions and roles, they must constantly think deeply to have new ideas, new plans, and plans suitable for carrying out their tasks. In order for those ideas to become reality, bringing high efficiency in the process of building and developing agencies, units, and localities. Developing the critical thinking capacity of students of the Political School in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam is an important content and measure for innovation, improving the quality of education, and training human resources, meeting the requirements of the situation and tasks. Thoroughly grasp and well implement the above contents and measures, contributing to bringing the Party's resolution on education and training into real life, successfully implementing the contents and targets on socio-economic development, building a team of cadres, civil servants and public employees in the new situation of the Province as determined. In the process of organization and implementation, it is necessary to flexibly and creatively apply, further promote the dynamism and creativity of students, arouse in each student the spirit of autonomy, self-confidence, self-reliance, self-

strengthening in studying, practicing professional capacity, having good moral qualities, having creative thinking in work, they also need to have the ability to think critically. This is an important skill to help students analyze, evaluate, and select new ideas to build policies, decisions and direct practices in a creative way and achieve the highest efficiency./.

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