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## Abstract

Critical thinking has been seen as the foundation of Western university education (Barnett, 1997). Today, educators and industry constantly emphasise the importance of students' and graduates' acquisition of critical thinking. One of the possible ways to facilitate critical thinking in students' learning is group learning. The aim of this qualitative study grounded in Constructivism was to work towards an understanding of critical thinking in the context of group learning. The research objective was to enquire into postgraduate accounting and finance students' perceptions of critical thinking in the context of group learning.

The sample was composed of twenty students who enrolled in the Fundamentals of Financial Management (FFM) module of an MSc course in Accounting and Finance. Students were required to participate in group learning and engage in critical thinking to complete the group assignment. The primary data collection method was in-depth semi-structured interviews and the supportive method was students' individual reflection reports. The study was particularly interested in perceptions and experiences within and between students in this constructivist model of learning.

This study used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the guide for data analysis. Student profiles were created in order to understand their perceptions and experiences according to their voices rather than the researcher's. This study adopted two approaches to generate the findings. First, it considered the significant variations in the ways students described and revealed their perceptions and responses in the context of group learning. At this stage, the study identified findings that include students' stance, perceptions, orientations to group learning, motivation and critical responses. Second, using an approach adapted from the 3P constructivist model of learning, the study went on to use matrices to identify potential relationships

between the findings identified in the first stage. This research identified that there were both congruent and incongruent relationships between the findings. In other words, it revealed that group learning provided a complex environment for learning and engagement with critical thinking. Students brought with them particular stances, perceptions, orientations and motivations that appeared to predispose them to engage in particular behaviours within the group. Hence, the congruent and incongruent relationships would make sense only after considering each individual student as a 'person who learns' (Javis, 2006).

This study sought to make three contributions: (1) A contribution to theory, (2) a contribution to the empirical literature; and (3) a contribution to the accounting professional and accounting academic, and to illuminate the teaching and learning pedagogical practices in higher education and accounting education. Limitations of the research were reported and a number of recommendations for future research were also explored.

## **Dedication and Acknowledgments**

Only by the Grace of God have I been blessed to complete this task.

This is dedicated to my wife and children, who have always been there for me throughout the entire journey of this study. Writing this thesis would not have been possible without their love and understanding. A special feeling of gratitude to my loving parents, who have been supportive in my decision to leave my home and career to pursue this dream.

My deep gratitude is owed to Dr. Ursula Lucas and Dr. Phaik Tan, whose patience, wisdom and guidance have been indispensable in the creation of this thesis. Their constructive criticism and comments have been highly appreciated.

I would like to acknowledge and thank my current HOD, who has been offering her kind support in any possible ways.

I would also like to thank the academic staff and the students at the University of the West of England for supporting me and making it possible for me to write this thesis.

## **Author's Declaration**

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: ..... DATE

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