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# The development and validation of the Blended Socratic Method of Teaching (BSMT): An instructional model to enhance critical thinking skills of undergraduate business students

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## ABSTRACT

Enhancing critical thinking skills is one of the paramount goals of many educational institutions. This study presents the development and validation of the Blended Socratic Method of Teaching (BSMT), a teaching model intended to foster critical thinking skills of business students in the undergraduate level. The main objectives of the study were to 1) to survey the critical thinking skills of undergraduate business students, and 2) to develop and validate the BSMT model designed to enhance critical thinking skills. The research procedure comprised of two phases related to the two research objectives: 1) surveying the critical thinking skills of 371 undergraduate business students at Naresuan University International College focusing on the three critical thinking competencies of the RED model—recognize assumptions, evaluate arguments, and draw conclusion, and the determination of the level of their critical thinking; and 2) developing the instructional model followed by validation of the model by five experts. The results of the study were: 1) the undergraduate business students have deficient critical thinking based on the RED Model competencies as they scored “below average” on the critical thinking appraisal, and 2) the developed model comprised six elements: focus, syntax, principles of reaction, the social system, the support system, and application. The experts were in complete agreement that the model is “highly appropriate” in improving the critical thinking skills of the business students. The main essence of the model is the syntax comprising of five steps: group assignment, analysis and writing of case studies; group presentation of the business case analysis in class; Socratic discussion/questioning in class; posting of the case study on the class Facebook account; and online Socratic discussion/questioning. The BSMT model is an authentic and comprehensive model combining the Socratic method of teaching, information and communication technology (ICT), and business case analysis.

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## Introduction

Critical thinking has been recognized as indispensable part of human life as well as in accomplishing tasks at work.

Before making any decision, a person has to gather, analyze, evaluate, and synthesize all the necessary information, as well as envision the consequences of the course of each alternative. To be successful in business, someone must possess critical thinking skills in order to make informed decisions quickly in a highly competitive and rapidly changing environment. According to the [American Management Association \(2010\)](#), businesses these days

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place special importance on critical thinking skills when employing people. Similarly, in a survey of 400 senior HR professionals, it was revealed that the respondents place critical thinking as the most important skill for their employees (Chartrand, Ishikawa, & Flander, 2013).

Critical thinking, as defined by the National Council for Excellence in Critical Thinking (2013), is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action. Since critical thinking skills are a high priority and demanded by the job market, educators are of a consensus that it should be one of the primary concerns for any educational institution to produce graduates with a high level of thinking skills, and these skills should be emphasized in every school curriculum.

In Thailand, education policy requires that Thai students should be able to reason, criticize, know how to solve problems, and apply these skills in real life situations (The Office of the National Education Center, 1996). The importance of critical thinking is also stressed in the National Education Act of 1999, as stipulated in Section 24. In addition, according to the Partnership for 21st Century Learning (n.d.), 21st century skills have been used by educators and put at the center of learning. Likewise, educators believed that schools must provide students with a broader set of “21st century skills” to thrive in a rapidly evolving, technology-saturated world (Jerald, 2009), and critical thinking is one of those skills.

Unfortunately, despite long-standing and numerous efforts of many sectors in Thailand to foster critical thinking; student's deficient critical thinking is still a persistent problem. This is due, in part, to the teaching methods used. That is, students are still taught to listen, rather than to question (AMP Group, 2011). Other factors contributing to these problems include Thai culture, the school system, and religion (Kaowiwattanakul, 2012).

Lack of critical thinking skills is a phenomenon existing, not only in Thailand, but in many parts of the world as well. As evidence of the crisis, the Business Roundtable, a network of company chief executives, found in a 2009 survey of 600 employers that it was difficult to find qualified employees who possess critical thinking (Taylor, 2010).

To deal with the lack of critical thinking skills among Thai students, this study presents an instructional model combining the Socratic method of teaching and information communication technology (ICT) by using the popular social media platform—Facebook. This model is known as the Blended Socratic Method of Teaching (BSMT). Many scholars have asserted that the Socratic method of teaching is an effective way to promote critical thinking skills since it aims to elicit student responses through a series of probing questions which encourage them to think logically before offering their answers (Anonymous, 2011). Furthermore, Paul and Elder (1997) stated that the Socratic method has been demonstrated for ages as the most powerful teaching method for enhancing critical thinking skills. In addition, since students these days are categorized as digital natives (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2008) and using technology is becoming the trend in teaching and learning

(Iordache & Lamanaskas, 2013), ICT is integrated into the model. Hence, the Socratic method was blended with ICT by using social media—Facebook. Blended learning which refers to the combination of traditional face-to-face teaching and online education (Gilbert & Flores-Zambada, 2011) is gaining popularity due to findings showing numerous benefits to student learning.

This study focused on undergraduate business students. In addition to the importance of critical thinking in business, it is said that an ordinary citizen interacts with businesswomen and businessmen far more frequently than with members of other professions (Colby, Ehrlich, Sullivan, & Dolle, 2011). Hence the focus of this study was undergraduate business students.

From a holistic perspective, why do we have to be concerned with critical thinking? The answer is very simple—it is not only for business students, but also for people in general because whenever we are dealing with human life, we are almost always dealing with thinking. Hence, the researcher developed an instructional model that will alleviate the problem of business students' deficient critical thinking skills.

### Research Questions

1. What is the level of the critical thinking skills of the undergraduate business students?
2. How can the appropriateness of the instructional model be developed and validated to improve the critical thinking skills of the business students in the undergraduate level?

### Research Objectives

1. To survey the critical thinking skills of undergraduate business students.
2. To develop and validate the BSMT model to improve the critical thinking skills of the undergraduate business students.

### Literature Review

#### Components of Teaching Models

According to Joyce, Weil, and Calhoun (2009), there are different essential components of a teaching model. In this study, the six components presented by Joyce et al. (2009) were adopted in developing the instructional model by Boa, Wattanatorn, and Tagong (2016), namely 1) focus; 2) syntax; 3) principles of reaction; 4) the social system; 5) support system; and 6) application.

#### The RED Model of Critical Thinking

Critical thinking has been variously defined, with some focusing on its attributes or components, while others focus on its applicability. In order to better explain critical thinking skills, a model known as the RED Model of Critical Thinking, which was used as a basis in developing the instructional model, is discussed.

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