

MEDIATING EFFECTS AMONG THE COMPONENTS OF CRITICAL THINKING DISPOSITION IN UNDERGRADUATES: A PLS-SEM ANALYSIS

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Critical thinking (CT), the core competence for undergraduates of the 21st century, is the most frequently assessed thinking aspect. However, with the inconsistency of its components, the relationships of the dimensions have rarely been investigated before. Based on the three CT disposition components (instant judgment, self-efficacy, and habitual truth-digging) we set up in a previous study, this study aimed to explore the structural relationships among the components of CT disposition in college students with the help of the partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) approach. The data was collected from 661 Chinese undergraduates (Age: M=19.57; SD=1.27; seven missing values); 328 of them were males (49.6%; Age: M=19.22; SD=1.21; three missing values) and 333 of them were females (50.4%; Age: M=19.91; SD=1.24; four missing values). The model fit was good with $\chi^2/df < 5$, RMSEA and SRMR < .08, CFI and TLI > .90. We found that (a) a strong tendency towards a correct instant judgment increased self-efficacy. Additionally, strong self-efficacy reinforced the habitual truth-digging inclination. However, with self-efficacy as the competitive partial mediation (path coefficient $-.197$, $p < .01$; indirect effect $p < .001$, $z > 1.96$), accurate instant judgment took its toll on inclination; (b) in contrast, habitual truth-digging positively affected self-efficacy, and self-efficacy accelerated instant judgment. However, habitual truth-digging had no significant effect on instant judgement (path coefficient $p > .05$) with self-efficacy as the complete mediation (indirect effect $p < .01$, $z > 1.96$). To conclude, with the mediating effects from self-efficacy, instant judgment, as a quick reflection, weakened the habitual truth-digging inclination. Thus, the nature of this judgment needs to be further specified. Besides, this procedure also proved that CT is neither an instant nor a lasting thinking process, but rather a competence which helps to find a balance to solve problems.

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