

Undergraduate Students' Perceptions of Philosophy as Useless and their Influence on Critical Thinking Skills: An Empirical Investigation

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Article History	Abstract
Original Research Article	<i>The declining interest in philosophy among university students has generated concerns regarding its implications for intellectual development and academic outcomes. Within contemporary higher education, philosophy is frequently perceived as impractical, overly abstract, and disconnected from career opportunities, leading many students to regard it as a useless academic discipline. Such perceptions may discourage engagement with philosophical inquiries and consequently hinder the development of critical thinking skills that are essential for academic success, professional competence, and responsible citizenship. This study investigates the relationship between undergraduate students' perceptions of philosophy and their critical thinking abilities. Guided by Dewey's Reflective Thinking Theory and Lipman's Philosophy for Children Framework, the study adopted a correlational survey design. Data were collected using the Student Attitude Toward Philosophy Questionnaire (SAPQ) and the Watson – Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal (WGCTA). The study examined whether negative perceptions of philosophy significantly predict lower levels of critical thinking among undergraduate students and whether exposure to philosophy courses is associated with higher critical thinking performance. The findings are expected to contribute to ongoing discussions on curriculum reform, critical thinking education, and the relevance of philosophy within higher education. The study concludes that philosophy remains an important intellectual discipline for cultivating analytical reasoning, reflective judgement, problem-solving abilities, and informed citizenship in the twenty-first century.</i> Keywords: Philosophy education, Critical thinking, Undergraduate students, Student attitudes, Watson – Glaser Test, Higher education, Educational development.
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Introduction

Education is widely recognised as a process aimed not only at the transmission of knowledge but also at the cultivation of rational, reflective, and responsible individuals who can navigate the complexities of contemporary society. In an era characterised by rapid technological advancements, information overload, and increasingly complex social challenges, the ability to think critically has become more important than ever. Higher education institutions are therefore expected to equip students with the intellectual tools necessary to analyse information, evaluate competing claims, solve problems, and make informed decisions. Among the various academic disciplines that contribute to

these objectives, philosophy occupies a unique and significant position because of its emphasis on questioning, reasoning, reflection, and the pursuit of truth (Igwe, Oche & Edinoh, 2026; Asemota, Edinoh & Attah, 2026; Bisong et al. 2025).

Philosophy has long been regarded as one of the foundations of education. Classical philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle argued that education should develop the capacity for rational inquiry and ethical judgement rather than merely impart factual knowledge. In modern educational thought, scholars such as John Dewey emphasised that genuine learning occurs when learners

engage in reflective thinking and active inquiries. Dewey (1933) maintained that education should encourage individuals to examine assumptions, question established beliefs, and develop habits of reflective judgement. Similarly (Edinoh & Wali-Essien, 2023; Nussbaum, 2010) argued that democratic societies require citizens who can think independently, evaluate arguments critically, and engage thoughtfully with diverse perspectives. From this standpoint, philosophy serves as a vital educational tool because it nurtures intellectual autonomy and disciplined reasoning.

Despite its recognised intellectual significance, philosophy increasingly faces challenges within contemporary higher education systems. In many societies, educational success is frequently measured in terms of employability, economic productivity, and direct labour market outcomes. Consequently, academic disciplines are often evaluated according to their perceived practical utility and immediate financial benefits. Within this climate, philosophy is frequently criticised as being abstract, theoretical, and disconnected from real-world concerns. Students, parents, employers, and even policymakers sometimes question the relevance of studying philosophical concepts that may not appear to lead directly to specific professional careers. As Biesta (2015) observed, the growing emphasis on economic efficiency and market-oriented education has contributed to the marginalisation of disciplines that focus primarily on intellectual and moral development rather than vocational training.

The perception of philosophy as a ‘useless’ subject has become increasingly prevalent among university students. Many undergraduates approach philosophy with preconceived notions that it is overly difficult, excessively abstract, or lacking practical value. These perceptions are often reinforced by societal expectations that prioritise career-oriented disciplines such as medicine, engineering, law, information technology, business, and other STEM-related fields. According to Bakhurst (2011), the dominance of utilitarian perspectives in education has led many students to view subjects primarily through the lens of economic returns rather than intellectual enrichment. As a result, philosophy is sometimes regarded as an academic luxury rather than a necessity.

Such negative perceptions may have significant educational consequences. Students who consider philosophy irrelevant may be less inclined to participate actively in philosophical discussions, engage in reflective inquiry, or appreciate the value of questioning assumptions. This is particularly concerning because many of the cognitive skills developed through philosophical engagement are closely associated with critical thinking. When undergraduates dismiss philosophy as useless, they may inadvertently reject

opportunities to develop reasoning abilities that are transferable across academic, professional, and personal contexts. Consequently, understanding students’ perceptions of philosophy is not merely an issue of subject preference but also a matter of broader educational importance.

Critical thinking has emerged as one of the most highly valued competencies of the twenty-first century. As societies become increasingly dependent on information, innovation, and complex decision-making, individuals are expected to possess the ability to evaluate evidence, identify misinformation, analyse arguments, and solve problems effectively. International organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), UNESCO, and the World Economic Forum consistently identify critical thinking as one of the most essential skills required for academic achievement, workplace success, and active citizenship. These organisations argue that learners must be prepared not only to acquire information but also to evaluate its reliability, relevance, and implications in a rapidly changing world.

Critical thinking generally refers to the ability to engage in purposeful, reasoned, and reflective judgement. Facione (2015) describes critical thinking as a process involving interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation. Individuals who possess strong critical thinking skills are better able to assess evidence, recognise logical inconsistencies, identify biases, and arrive at well-reasoned conclusions. Such skills are increasingly necessary in contemporary societies where individuals are regularly confronted with conflicting information, misinformation, and complex social, political, and technological issues.

Many scholars have identified philosophy as one of the most effective disciplines for fostering critical thinking abilities. Through philosophical inquiry, students are encouraged to question assumptions, examine alternative viewpoints, construct logical arguments, and justify their conclusions using evidence and reason. Lipman (2003) argued that philosophical dialogue promotes higher-order thinking by encouraging learners to engage in reflective and analytical reasoning. Similarly, Paul and Elder (2014) maintained that philosophical thinking develops intellectual standards such as clarity, accuracy, relevance, logic, and fairness, all of which are fundamental components of critical thought. Splitter (2011) further contended that philosophy enables learners to become more reflective and intellectually responsible thinkers.

Empirical evidence also supports the role of philosophy in enhancing critical thinking development. Studies conducted by Abrami et al. (2015), Topping and Trickey

(2007), and Gorard et al. (2015) found that students exposed to philosophy-based instructional approaches demonstrated significant improvements in reasoning, argumentation, problem-solving, and cognitive performance. These findings suggest that philosophical engagement contributes positively to intellectual growth and supports broader educational objectives aimed at developing independent and analytical thinkers.

Although substantial research has examined the effectiveness of philosophy instruction in promoting critical thinking, comparatively little attention has been given to the influence of students' perceptions of philosophy itself. Existing studies largely focus on teaching methods, curriculum design, and learning outcomes, while relatively few investigate how students' attitudes toward philosophy may shape their willingness to engage in philosophical inquiry. It is possible that undergraduates who perceive philosophy as valuable are more likely to participate actively in reflective discussions and analytical exercises, thereby strengthening their critical thinking skills. Conversely, students who regard philosophy as useless may be less motivated to engage in activities that promote intellectual reflection and reasoning, Asemota, Edinoh & Wakili (2026).

This gap in the literature is particularly important within developing higher education contexts where educational resources are limited and curriculum decisions are frequently influenced by concerns about employability and economic development. Policymakers and university administrators continue to debate the place of philosophy within university curricula, often questioning whether the discipline should remain a core component of general education programmes or receive reduced emphasis in favour of more vocationally oriented fields of study. Empirical evidence regarding the relationship between perceptions of philosophy and critical thinking outcomes could therefore provide valuable guidance for curriculum development, educational planning, and policy formulation within higher education.

Furthermore, understanding this relationship has implications beyond philosophy departments. If positive perceptions of philosophy are associated with stronger critical thinking skills, educational stakeholders may need to reconsider how philosophy is presented, taught, and integrated within university programmes. Improving students' appreciation of philosophy could potentially enhance their intellectual engagement and contribute to the development of competencies that are essential for lifelong learning, democratic participation, professional success, and responsible leadership.

Against this background, the present study investigates the influence of undergraduate students' perceptions of

philosophy on their critical thinking abilities. Specifically, the study seeks to determine whether students who perceive philosophy as useful and intellectually valuable demonstrate higher levels of critical thinking than those who regard it as irrelevant or unnecessary. By examining this relationship, the study contributes to ongoing discussions regarding the educational significance of philosophy within higher education and its role in cultivating the critical thinkers required for the challenges of the twenty-first century.

Statement of the Problem

The development of critical thinking remains a central objective of contemporary higher education. Nevertheless, concerns persist regarding undergraduate students' declining capacity for analytical reasoning, logical evaluation, and reflective judgement. Simultaneously, philosophy, which has historically served as a foundation for critical inquiry, is increasingly perceived by many university students as an irrelevant academic discipline with limited practical value.

The growing perception that philosophy is useless may discourage students from engaging in reflective and analytical learning processes that promote critical thinking. As higher education institutions increasingly prioritise vocational, professional, and technical programmes, the role of philosophy within university curricula continues to be questioned. Consequently, there is a need for empirical evidence examining whether undergraduate students' negative attitudes toward philosophy are associated with reduced critical thinking skills.

Although previous studies have established that philosophy instruction enhances reasoning abilities, limited research has investigated how students' perceptions of philosophy itself affect critical thinking development within university settings. This gap in knowledge necessitates empirical investigation to determine whether negative perceptions constitute a barrier to intellectual growth, reflective inquiries, and critical reasoning among undergraduate students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between undergraduate students' perceptions of philosophy and their critical thinking skills.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Determine undergraduate students' perceptions of philosophy as an academic discipline.
2. Assess undergraduate students' critical thinking abilities.

3. Examine the relationship between perceptions of philosophy and critical thinking skills.
4. Compare critical thinking performance between undergraduate students exposed to philosophy courses and those without such exposure.
5. Determine whether attitudes toward philosophy significantly predict critical thinking performance among undergraduate students.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are undergraduate students' perceptions of philosophy as an academic discipline?
2. What is the level of critical thinking skills among undergraduate students?
3. Is there a significant relationship between undergraduate students' perceptions of philosophy and their critical thinking skills?
4. Do undergraduate students exposed to philosophy courses demonstrate higher critical thinking abilities than those without such exposure?
5. To what extent do undergraduate students' attitudes toward philosophy predict critical thinking performance?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

H01

There is no significant relationship between undergraduate students' perceptions of philosophy and their critical thinking skills.

H02

There is no significant difference in critical thinking scores between undergraduate students exposed to philosophy courses and those without exposure.

H03

Undergraduate students' attitudes toward philosophy do not significantly predict critical thinking performance.

Literature Review

Concept of Philosophy Education

Philosophy is widely regarded as the systematic pursuit of wisdom, knowledge, truth, and understanding through rational inquiry, logical analysis, and critical reflection. It seeks to address fundamental questions concerning reality, knowledge, morality, existence, and human purpose while

encouraging individuals to think deeply and critically about the world around them (Audi, 2018). Unlike disciplines that focus primarily on the accumulation of factual knowledge, philosophy emphasises the processes of questioning, reasoning, evaluating evidence, and examining assumptions. As such, it occupies a unique position within education because it develops the intellectual habits necessary for thoughtful and informed decision-making.

Educational philosophers argue that philosophy equips learners with essential cognitive tools for analysing concepts, evaluating arguments, identifying inconsistencies, and constructing coherent explanations (Ozmon & Craver, 2017). Through philosophical inquiry, students learn not merely what to think but, more importantly, how to think. This distinction is particularly important in contemporary societies where individuals are constantly exposed to diverse perspectives, competing claims, and vast amounts of information. Philosophy encourages learners to approach such information critically rather than accepting it uncritically.

According to Knight (2018), philosophy provides the conceptual and intellectual foundations upon which educational theories, policies, and practices are built. Educational decisions concerning curriculum, teaching methods, assessment procedures, and learning objectives are often rooted in underlying philosophical assumptions about knowledge, human nature, and the purpose of education. Consequently, philosophy enables students and educators to examine the beliefs and values that shape educational systems and social institutions. By engaging with philosophical questions, learners develop a deeper understanding of the principles that influence societal structures and human behaviour.

Similarly, Noddings (2018) maintains that philosophy fosters intellectual autonomy, reflective judgement, and ethical awareness. These qualities are essential for democratic citizenship because they enable individuals to participate meaningfully in public discourse, evaluate social issues critically, and make informed decisions that affect both themselves and their communities. In this sense, philosophy contributes not only to academic development but also to personal growth and responsible citizenship.

Historically, philosophy has been closely linked to education and human development. Classical philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle regarded philosophical inquiries as central to the cultivation of wisdom and virtue. Socrates emphasised questioning and dialogue as pathways to knowledge, while Plato viewed education as a process of intellectual enlightenment. Aristotle further argued that rational inquiry and critical reasoning are essential for achieving human flourishing. In more recent times, philosophers such as John Dewey and

Bertrand Russell continued to advocate for philosophical reflection as a cornerstone of education. Dewey viewed reflective thinking as fundamental to meaningful learning, while Russell emphasised the role of philosophy in broadening intellectual horizons and promoting open-mindedness (Russell, 2009).

Contemporary scholars continue to highlight the importance of philosophy in fostering critical reasoning, creativity, intellectual maturity, and reflective judgement (Splitter, 2011; Bakhurst, 2011). As educational systems increasingly seek to prepare learners for complex and rapidly changing societies, philosophy remains highly relevant because it develops the cognitive and reflective capacities necessary for lifelong learning and effective participation in modern life.

Student Perceptions of Philosophy

Undergraduate students' perceptions and attitudes towards academic disciplines play a significant role in shaping their learning experiences, motivation, engagement, and academic achievement. Educational psychologists have consistently shown that learners are more likely to invest effort, persist through challenges, and achieve positive outcomes when they perceive a subject as valuable and relevant to their personal goals (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020). Conversely, negative attitudes often lead to reduced interest, lower participation, and diminished academic performance.

Within this context, philosophy faces a unique challenge. Research suggests that many undergraduate students perceive philosophy as abstract, difficult, theoretical, and disconnected from practical concerns (Hand, 2018). Unlike subjects that appear to offer direct pathways to specific professions, philosophy is often viewed as lacking immediate applicability in the labour market. Consequently, students may question its relevance to their future careers and everyday lives.

These perceptions are influenced by broader societal and educational trends. In many countries, educational success is increasingly measured in terms of employability, economic productivity, and workforce readiness. As a result, disciplines associated with science, technology, engineering, and mathematics often receive greater attention and support than humanities subjects (Biesta, 2015). The growing emphasis on technological innovation and economic competitiveness has contributed to the belief that subjects should be evaluated primarily according to their economic value.

Nussbaum (2010) argues that modern higher education systems have increasingly marginalised humanities disciplines because their contributions are not as easily measured through economic indicators or vocational

outcomes. Yet subjects such as philosophy make substantial contributions to intellectual development, ethical reasoning, civic engagement, and democratic participation. The tendency to overlook these contributions has led many undergraduate students to underestimate the importance of philosophical education.

Despite these initial perceptions, research suggests that undergraduate students' attitudes towards philosophy can change significantly through meaningful engagement with philosophical inquiry. Studies conducted by Gorard et al. (2015), Topping and Trickey (2007), and Cassidy and Christie (2013) found that learners who initially viewed philosophy with scepticism often developed more positive attitudes after participating in structured philosophical discussions and inquiry-based learning activities. As students experienced the intellectual benefits of philosophical thinking, they began to recognise its relevance to problem-solving, decision-making, and everyday reasoning.

These findings suggest that undergraduate students' perceptions of philosophy are not fixed but can be shaped by educational experiences. Understanding how such perceptions influence learning outcomes remains an important area of inquiry, particularly in relation to critical thinking development.

Critical Thinking Skills

Critical thinking is widely recognised as one of the most important learning outcomes of higher education in contemporary society. It refers to the ability to engage in purposeful, reflective, and self-regulatory thinking that facilitates sound judgement and effective decision-making (Wali-Essien et al., 2025). Facione (2015) defines critical thinking as a process involving interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation. Individuals who possess strong critical thinking skills are better equipped to assess evidence, identify logical inconsistencies, evaluate competing arguments, and draw reasoned conclusions.

Paul and Elder (2014) describe critical thinking as disciplined thinking guided by intellectual standards such as clarity, accuracy, precision, relevance, depth, breadth, fairness, and logical consistency. According to these scholars, effective critical thinkers actively question assumptions, seek evidence, consider alternative perspectives, and evaluate the quality of their reasoning. Similarly, Ennis (2018) defines critical thinking as reasonable and reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or what action to take.

The importance of critical thinking has grown considerably in the twenty-first century. The rapid expansion of digital technology, social media platforms, artificial intelligence,

and global communication networks has created unprecedented access to information. While these offers significant opportunities for learning and innovation, it also presents challenges associated with misinformation, disinformation, and information overload. University students must therefore possess the ability to evaluate the credibility of sources, distinguish facts from opinions, and make informed judgements based on evidence (OECD, 2021).

Beyond its role in information evaluation, critical thinking contributes significantly to academic success, creativity, innovation, and problem-solving. Undergraduate students with strong critical thinking skills tend to perform better academically because they are able to analyse complex issues, synthesise information from multiple sources, and apply knowledge effectively in new situations. Research consistently demonstrates positive relationships between critical thinking and academic achievement, decision-making ability, creativity, and lifelong learning (Halpern, 2014; Abrami et al., 2015).

Given its importance, universities increasingly regard critical thinking as a core graduate competency that should be cultivated across academic disciplines. Developing this competency requires learning environments that encourage inquiry, reflection, discussion, and analytical reasoning – characteristics that are strongly associated with philosophical education.

Philosophy and Critical Thinking Development

The relationship between philosophy and critical thinking has attracted considerable scholarly attention over the years. Philosophy has long been viewed as one of the most effective disciplines for cultivating the intellectual skills required for critical thought. At its core, philosophical inquiry involves questioning assumptions, analysing concepts, evaluating arguments, considering alternative viewpoints, and constructing logical justifications. These activities closely mirror the processes involved in critical thinking.

Lipman (2003) argues that philosophy provides a structured environment in which undergraduate students can develop reasoning, argumentation, reflection, and judgement. Through philosophical dialogue, students learn to articulate their thoughts clearly, evaluate the reasoning of others, and defend their positions using evidence and logical analysis. Such experiences strengthen cognitive processes that are essential for effective critical thinking.

Empirical evidence strongly supports this relationship. Studies conducted by Topping and Trickey (2007), Gorard et al. (2015), and Fair et al. (2015) found that participation in philosophy programmes significantly improved students' reasoning abilities, academic achievement, and

cognitive performance. Students exposed to philosophical inquiry demonstrated greater confidence in analysing problems, evaluating evidence, and engaging in reflective discussions.

Similarly, (Asemota, Edinoh & Wakili 2026; Abrami et al. 2015), through a comprehensive meta-analysis of critical thinking interventions, reported that instructional approaches emphasising dialogue, reflection, argumentation, and inquiries produce substantial gains in critical thinking performance. These characteristics closely resemble the pedagogical approaches commonly used in philosophy education. The findings therefore provide strong support for the view that philosophical engagement contributes significantly to cognitive development.

Daniel and Auriac (2011) further found that philosophical discussions enhance students' metacognitive awareness, reasoning complexity, argumentative competence, and ability to consider multiple perspectives. By encouraging learners to question assumptions and justify conclusions logically, philosophy creates opportunities for deeper intellectual engagement and reflective thinking.

Despite the substantial evidence linking philosophy instruction to critical thinking development, an important gap remains in the literature. Most existing studies focus on the effectiveness of philosophy-based interventions and teaching strategies, while relatively little attention has been given to undergraduate students' perceptions of philosophy itself. It remains unclear whether students who view philosophy as irrelevant or useless are less willing to engage in philosophical inquiry and, consequently, less likely to develop strong critical thinking skills. Understanding this relationship is particularly important within higher education environments where philosophy continues to face criticism regarding its practical relevance.

The present study therefore seeks to address this gap by examining whether negative perceptions of philosophy is associated with lower levels of critical thinking among undergraduate students. By focusing on undergraduate students' attitudes towards philosophy rather than instructional methods alone, the study contributes a new perspective to the growing body of literature on philosophy education and critical thinking development.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework provides the conceptual foundation for understanding the relationship between undergraduate students' perceptions of philosophy and the development of critical thinking skills. This study is anchored primarily on Dewey's Reflective Thinking Theory and supported by Lipman's Theory of Philosophical Inquiry. Both perspectives emphasise the importance of reflection, questioning, dialogue, and reasoned inquiries in

the development of higher-order thinking skills. The theories are particularly relevant because they explain how students' attitudes toward philosophy may influence their willingness to engage in intellectual activities that foster critical thinking.

Dewey's Reflective Thinking Theory

This study is anchored primarily on Dewey's Reflective Thinking Theory (1933). Dewey argued that education should cultivate reflective inquiry rather than passive acceptance of information. Reflective thinking involves the active, persistent, and careful examination of beliefs, assumptions, and knowledge claims in light of supporting evidence and logical reasoning. According to Dewey, meaningful learning occurs when learners analyse problems, investigate evidence, consider alternative explanations, and arrive at reasoned conclusions.

Dewey maintained that reflective inquiry is essential for intellectual development because it enables individuals to move beyond superficial understanding toward deeper levels of analysis and judgement. Within the context of higher education, reflective thinking equips undergraduate students with the capacity to evaluate information critically, solve complex problems, and make informed decisions.

The theory is particularly relevant to this study because students who perceive philosophy as useful and intellectually valuable may be more willing to engage in reflective inquiry, analytical reasoning, and critical examination of ideas. Conversely, students who dismiss philosophy as irrelevant or useless may be less inclined to participate in reflective learning experiences, thereby limiting the development of critical thinking skills. Dewey's theory therefore provides a useful explanation of how students' attitudes towards philosophy may influence their intellectual growth and reasoning abilities.

Lipman's Theory of Philosophical Inquiry

The study is further supported by Lipman's Theory of Philosophical Inquiry (2003). Although originally developed within the Philosophy for Children movement, the central principles of Lipman's work extend beyond childhood education and remain applicable to higher education contexts. Lipman argued that philosophical inquiry promotes critical, creative, and caring thinking through dialogue, questioning, reflection, and collaborative reasoning.

According to Lipman, philosophical discussion encourages learners to examine assumptions, evaluate arguments, justify conclusions, and consider alternative viewpoints. Such intellectual activities strengthen reasoning abilities and enhance the quality of judgement. Through participation in philosophical inquiry, students develop the

capacity to think independently, assess evidence critically, and engage constructively with complex issues.

The theory supports the assumption that undergraduate students who appreciate the value of philosophy are more likely to engage actively in philosophical dialogue and reflective reasoning. Consequently, they may experience greater development of critical thinking skills than students who reject or undervalue philosophical inquiry. Lipman's perspective therefore complements Dewey's theory by highlighting the role of philosophical engagement in fostering intellectual growth and higher-order thinking.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework assumes that undergraduate students' perceptions of philosophy influence their level of engagement in reflective inquiry and philosophical reasoning. Positive perceptions encourage active participation in philosophical discussions, critical analysis, reflective thinking, and argument evaluation. These intellectual activities contribute to the development of stronger critical thinking skills.

Conversely, negative perceptions of philosophy may discourage engagement in reflective and analytical learning experiences, thereby limiting opportunities for the development of critical thinking abilities. The framework therefore proposes that students' attitudes towards philosophy serve as an important factor influencing critical thinking outcomes.

Independent Variable

1. Undergraduate Students' Perceptions of Philosophy
- 2.

Dependent Variable

1. Critical Thinking Skills
- 2.

Intervening Variables

1. Age
2. Gender
3. Year of Study
4. Academic Discipline
5. Socioeconomic Background

Empirical Review Summary

The empirical literature reviewed in this study provides strong evidence that philosophy plays a significant role in the development of critical thinking skills. Researchers consistently report that engagement with philosophical inquiry enhances learners' ability to analyse arguments,

evaluate evidence, identify assumptions, solve problems, and make reasoned judgements. Studies conducted within higher education institutions indicate that philosophy-based instruction encourages intellectual curiosity, reflective thinking, and logical reasoning, all of which are fundamental components of critical thinking. These findings reinforce the long-standing argument that philosophy contributes meaningfully to students' cognitive and intellectual development.

Furthermore, empirical studies have shown that structured philosophical discussions, classroom debates, inquiry-based learning, and reflective dialogue can significantly improve students' reasoning abilities and academic performance. Research by scholars such as Lipman (2003), Topping and Trickey (2007), Abrami et al. (2015), and Gorard et al. (2015) demonstrates that students who participate in philosophy-oriented learning activities often exhibit higher levels of analytical thinking and intellectual engagement than their peers who do not receive similar exposure. Collectively, these studies suggest that philosophy serves as an effective educational tool for fostering the higher-order thinking skills required in contemporary society.

Despite these valuable contributions, an important gap remains within the existing body of knowledge. Most empirical investigations have concentrated on the effectiveness of philosophy instruction, teaching methods, curriculum interventions, and learning outcomes. While these studies provide insight into how philosophy can enhance critical thinking, they offer limited understanding of how students' attitudes and perceptions towards philosophy may influence these outcomes. In other words, researchers have largely examined what philosophy does for students but have paid comparatively less attention to how students' beliefs about philosophy affect their willingness to engage with it.

This gap is particularly important because students do not approach academic subjects with neutral attitudes. Their perceptions of a subject often influence their level of motivation, participation, engagement, and commitment to learning. Students who view philosophy as meaningful, relevant, and intellectually stimulating may be more willing to engage in reflective inquiry, challenge assumptions, and participate actively in critical discussions. Conversely, students who perceive philosophy as abstract, impractical, or irrelevant may be less inclined to invest effort in philosophical learning activities, thereby limiting opportunities for critical thinking development.

In contemporary higher education environments where emphasis is increasingly placed on career-oriented and economically driven disciplines, negative perceptions of philosophy have become more common. Many

undergraduate students question the practical value of philosophy, particularly when compared with disciplines that appear to offer more direct employment opportunities. Such perceptions may influence not only students' attitudes towards philosophy but also their broader intellectual engagement and willingness to develop critical reasoning skills. Yet empirical evidence examining this relationship remains relatively scarce, particularly within developing countries and emerging higher education systems.

Therefore, the reviewed literature highlights a clear need for further investigation into the attitudinal dimensions of philosophy education. Understanding whether undergraduate students' perceptions of philosophy influence their critical thinking abilities could provide important insights for educators, curriculum planners, university administrators, and policymakers seeking to strengthen critical thinking within higher education. Addressing this gap would also contribute to ongoing debates regarding the relevance and place of philosophy in contemporary university education.

It is against this backdrop that the present study is undertaken. The study seeks to extend existing knowledge by examining whether negative perceptions of philosophy is associated with lower levels of critical thinking performance among undergraduate students. By focusing on students' attitudes rather than instructional methods alone, the study provides a fresh perspective on the factors that may facilitate or hinder the development of critical thinking skills within higher education. The findings are expected to contribute to scholarly discussions on philosophy education, critical thinking development, and curriculum reform in universities.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a correlational survey research design. The design was used to examine the relationship between undergraduate students' perceptions of philosophy and their critical thinking skills. In addition, the study investigated differences in critical thinking performance between undergraduate students who had been exposed to philosophy courses and those who had not received formal exposure to philosophy.

The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to examine naturally occurring relationships among variables without manipulating participants' experiences. It also provided an opportunity to investigate how attitudes towards philosophy relate to critical thinking outcomes within a university environment.

Population of the Study

The target population comprised undergraduate students enrolled in selected universities in South Eastern Nigeria. These students were selected because university education is expected to foster higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, reflection, evaluation, and reasoned judgement. Furthermore, undergraduate students are exposed to diverse academic experiences that may influence their perceptions of philosophy and the development of critical thinking abilities.

The estimated population consisted of approximately 4,800 undergraduate students drawn from two selected universities.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A sample of 400 undergraduate students was selected using a multistage sampling procedure.

The sample consisted of:

1. Undergraduate students exposed to philosophy courses (n = 200)
2. Undergraduate students without formal exposure to philosophy courses (n = 200)

Stratified random sampling was employed to ensure proportional representation based on gender, year of study, and academic discipline. Thereafter, simple random sampling techniques were used to select participants from each stratum.

Instruments for Data Collection

Two instruments were used for data collection:

Student Attitude Toward Philosophy Questionnaire (SAPQ)

The Student Attitude Toward Philosophy Questionnaire (SAPQ) was developed by the researcher and consisted of 20 Likert-scale items designed to measure undergraduate students' perceptions of philosophy.

Response options included:

1. Strongly Agree (4)
2. Agree (3)
3. Disagree (2)
4. Strongly Disagree (1)

Sample items included:

1. Philosophy contributes little to real-life success.
2. Philosophy improves reasoning abilities.
3. Philosophy is a waste of academic time.
4. Philosophy helps people think critically.

Negative items were reverse scored. Higher scores indicated more positive perceptions of philosophy.

Watson – Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal (WGCTA)

The Watson – Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal (WGCTA) was employed to assess critical thinking abilities among undergraduate students.

The instrument measured:

1. Inference
2. Recognition of Assumptions
3. Deduction
4. Interpretation
5. Evaluation of Arguments

Scores ranged from 0 to 100, with higher scores indicating stronger critical thinking abilities.

Validity of Instruments

Content and face validity were established through expert review by three professors specialising in Philosophy of Education and Educational Measurement and Evaluation. Their observations and recommendations were incorporated into the instruments before final administration.

Reliability of Instruments

A pilot study involving 40 undergraduate students from a university outside the study area was conducted to determine the reliability of the instruments. Cronbach's Alpha coefficients obtained were as follows:

Instrument Reliability Coefficient

SAPQ .87

WGCTA .84

The coefficients indicated satisfactory internal consistency and reliability for the study.

Procedure for Data Collection

Following approval from the relevant university authorities and the informed consent of participants, the instruments were administered during scheduled academic periods. Participants completed both the questionnaire and the critical thinking assessment under the supervision of the researcher and trained research assistants.

The administration process lasted approximately 60 minutes. A total of 400 copies of the instruments were distributed and successfully retrieved, resulting in a 100 percent response rate.

Method of Data Analysis

Data collected were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

The following statistical tools were employed:

1. Mean and Standard Deviation to answer the research questions.
2. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation to determine the relationship between students' perceptions of philosophy and critical thinking skills.
3. Independent Samples t-test to examine differences in critical thinking performance between students exposed to philosophy courses and those without exposure.

4. Multiple Regression Analysis to determine the predictive influence of students' attitudes toward philosophy on critical thinking performance.

All hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

Results

This section presents the findings obtained from the analysis of data collected from 400 undergraduate students drawn from selected universities South Eastern Nigeria. Descriptive statistics were used to answer the research questions, while inferential statistics were employed to test the hypotheses formulated for the study.

Research Question 1

What are undergraduate students' perceptions of philosophy as an academic discipline?

Table 1: Undergraduate Students' Perceptions of Philosophy

Perception Category	Frequency	Percentage
Positive Perception	142	35.5
Neutral Perception	88	22.0
Negative Perception	170	42.5
Total	400	100

Table 1: Interpretation of Undergraduate Students' Perceptions of Philosophy

The findings presented in Table 1 reveal that undergraduate students' hold varying perceptions regarding philosophy as an academic discipline. The largest proportion of respondents (42.5%) reported negative perceptions of philosophy, while 35.5% expressed positive perceptions and 22.0% remained neutral. This distribution indicates that more students view philosophy unfavourably than favourably. The predominance of negative perceptions suggests that many undergraduate students may consider

philosophy to be abstract, difficult, or lacking direct practical relevance to their educational and career aspirations. Such perceptions may reflect contemporary societal emphasis on career-oriented disciplines and subjects perceived to have immediate economic value. The findings further imply that a considerable number of students may not fully appreciate the contribution of philosophy to intellectual development, critical reasoning, and decision-making. This negative orientation towards philosophy may have implications for students' willingness to engage in reflective inquiry and analytical thinking activities that are central to philosophical learning.

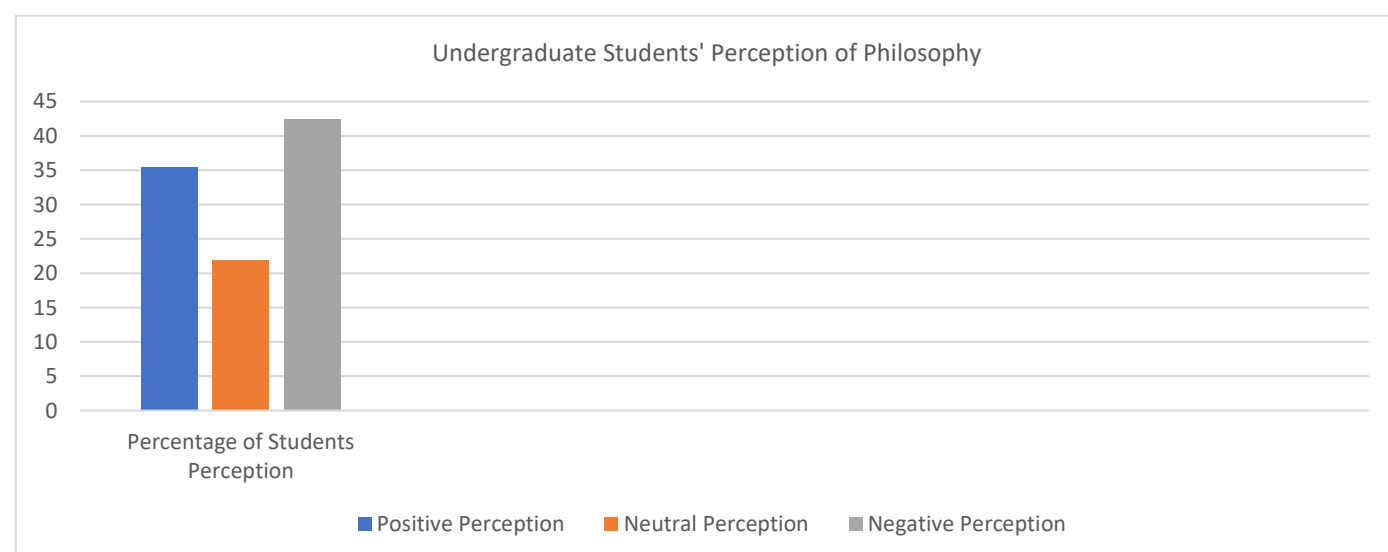


Chart 1: Distribution of Undergraduate Students' Perceptions

Chart 1 visually illustrates the distribution of undergraduate students' perceptions of philosophy. The chart clearly shows that the negative perception category constitutes the largest segment of the sample, followed by positive perception and then neutral perception. The visual representation reinforces the findings reported in Table 1 by highlighting the imbalance between favourable and unfavourable attitudes toward philosophy. The dominance of negative perceptions suggests a need for educators and curriculum planners to improve students' understanding of the relevance and practical benefits of philosophical inquiry. The chart also demonstrates that positive perceptions are not absent, indicating that a significant proportion of students recognise the intellectual value of philosophy despite prevailing scepticism.

Research Question 2

What is the level of critical thinking skills among undergraduate students?

Table 2: Level of Critical Thinking Skills

Critical Thinking Level	Frequency	Percentage
High	105	26.3
Moderate	168	42.0
Low	127	31.7
Total	400	100

Table 2: Interpretation of Level of Critical Thinking Skills

Table 2 presents the distribution of undergraduate students according to their level of critical thinking skills. The results show that 42.0% of respondents demonstrated a moderate level of critical thinking, while 31.7% exhibited low critical thinking skills. Only 26.3% attained a high level of critical thinking.

These findings suggest that although many undergraduate students possess some capacity for analytical and reflective reasoning, relatively few have developed advanced critical thinking competencies. The fact that nearly one-third of the students demonstrated low critical thinking ability raises concerns regarding their preparedness to evaluate information, solve complex problems, and make evidence-based decisions. The predominance of moderate critical thinking levels indicates that there remains substantial room for educational interventions aimed at strengthening higher-order thinking skills among learners.

Research Question 3

Is there a relationship between undergraduate students' perceptions of philosophy and critical thinking skills?

Table 3: Correlation Between Undergraduate Students' Philosophy Perception and Critical Thinking

Variables	N	r	p
Philosophy Perception	400	.61	.000
Critical Thinking Skills	400		

Table 3: Interpretation of Correlation Between Philosophy Perception and Critical Thinking

The results in Table 3 indicate a strong positive relationship between undergraduate students' perceptions of philosophy and their critical thinking skills ($r = .61$, $p < .001$). The positive correlation coefficient suggests that students who hold favourable views of philosophy tend to demonstrate higher levels of critical thinking than those who possess negative perceptions. The magnitude of the relationship is substantial, indicating that attitudes toward philosophy are closely associated with intellectual engagement and reasoning ability. This finding suggests that students who value philosophical inquiry may be more willing to participate in reflective discussions, examine assumptions, evaluate evidence, and consider alternative viewpoints. Consequently, positive perceptions of philosophy appear to contribute meaningfully to the development of critical thinking competencies.

Hypothesis One

H01:

There is no significant relationship between undergraduate students' perceptions of philosophy and their critical thinking skills.

Table 4: Pearson Correlation Analysis

Variable	r	p-value	Decision
Perception and Critical Thinking	.61	.000	Rejected

Decision

Since $p < .05$, the null hypothesis was rejected. There is a significant relationship between students' perceptions of philosophy and critical thinking skills.

Table 4: Interpretation of Pearson Correlation Analysis (Hypothesis One)

Table 4 was used to test the hypothesis that no significant relationship exists between undergraduate students' perceptions of philosophy and critical thinking skills. The analysis yielded a correlation coefficient of .61 with a p-value of .000, which is below the .05 level of significance. The result indicates that the relationship observed is not due to chance. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected,

confirming that undergraduate students' perceptions of philosophy are significantly related to their critical thinking abilities. This finding provides empirical support for the argument that attitudes towards philosophical inquiry influence intellectual development. Undergraduate students who appreciate the value of philosophy appear more likely to develop stronger reasoning and analytical skills than those who view philosophy negatively.

Hypothesis Two
H02:

There is no significant difference in critical thinking scores between undergraduate students exposed to philosophy courses and undergraduate students without exposure to philosophy courses.

Table 5: Independent Samples t-test

Group	N	Mean	SD	t	p
Undergraduate Students Exposed to Philosophy Courses	200	74.82	8.61	8.47	.000
Undergraduate Students Without Philosophy Course Exposure	200	65.11	9.24		

Decision

Since $p < .05$, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 5: Interpretation of Independent Samples t-Test (Hypothesis Two)

The findings in Table 5 reveal a significant difference in critical thinking scores between undergraduate students exposed to philosophy courses and undergraduate students without formal exposure to philosophy courses. Undergraduate students exposed to philosophy courses recorded a mean score of 74.82, whereas undergraduate students without formal exposure to philosophy courses obtained a lower mean score of 65.11. The calculated t-

value of 8.47 and p-value of .000 indicates that this difference is statistically significant. The results suggest that exposure to philosophical education contributes positively to critical thinking development. Students who study philosophy appear better equipped to analyse arguments, evaluate evidence, and engage in reflective reasoning than their counterparts who have not received similar exposure. The substantial difference in mean scores underscores the potential value of philosophy as an educational tool for promoting higher-order cognitive skills. Undergraduate students exposed to philosophy courses obtained significantly higher critical thinking scores than undergraduate students without formal exposure to philosophy courses.

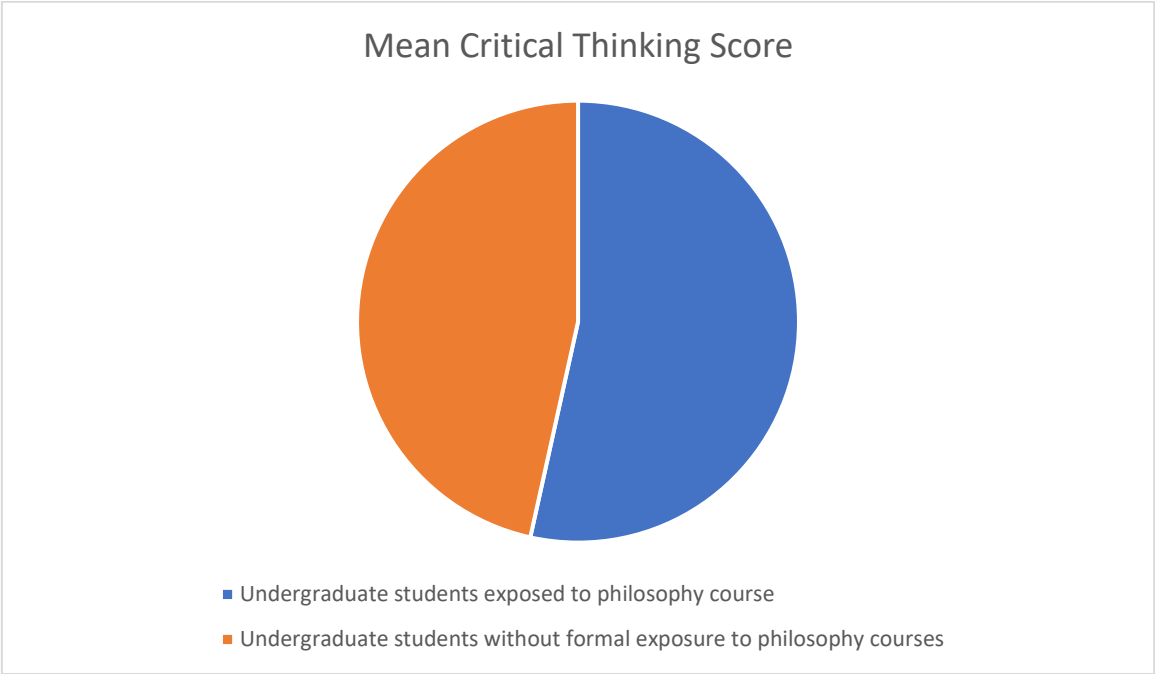


Chart 2: Mean Critical Thinking Scores

Interpretation of Mean Critical Thinking Scores

Chart 2 provides a visual comparison of the mean critical thinking scores of undergraduate students exposed to

philosophy courses and undergraduate students without formal exposure to philosophy courses. The chart clearly shows that students who have studied philosophy consistently outperform those who have not. The visual gap

between the two groups reinforces the statistical findings presented in Table 5. It demonstrates that undergraduate students exposed to philosophy courses possess stronger critical thinking abilities and highlights the practical benefits of philosophical education. The chart provides compelling evidence that engagement with philosophy may enhance undergraduate students' capacity for logical reasoning, reflective judgement, and problem-solving.

Hypothesis Three

H03:

Undergraduate students' attitudes toward philosophy do not significantly predict critical thinking performance.

Table 6: Multiple Regression Analysis

Predictor	Beta	t	P
Philosophy Attitude	.53	12.41	.000
Age	.08	1.72	.086
Gender	.04	0.98	.327
Year of Study	.15	3.42	.001

$R^2 = .42$

$F = 71.33$

$p < .001$

Decision

The null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 6: Interpretation of Multiple Regression Analysis (Hypothesis Three)

Table 6 presents the results of the multiple regression analysis conducted to determine whether students' attitudes toward philosophy predict critical thinking performance. The analysis revealed that philosophy attitude emerged as the strongest predictor of critical thinking ($\beta = .53$, $t = 12.41$, $p < .001$). Year of study also significantly predicted critical thinking performance ($\beta = .15$, $p = .001$), whereas age and gender were not statistically significant predictors. The model accounted for 42% of the variance in critical thinking scores ($R^2 = .42$), indicating that the predictors included in the model explain a substantial proportion of differences in students' critical thinking abilities. The findings suggest that undergraduate students' attitudes toward philosophy exert a stronger influence on critical thinking performance than demographic variables such as age and gender. This underscores the importance of fostering positive perceptions of philosophy as a means of enhancing intellectual development and reasoning competence. Attitude toward philosophy emerged as the strongest

predictor of critical thinking performance. The model explained 42% of the variance in critical thinking scores.

The findings revealed that a substantial proportion of undergraduate students held negative perceptions of philosophy. The results further showed a significant positive relationship between perceptions of philosophy and critical thinking skills. Undergraduate students exposed to philosophy courses demonstrated significantly higher critical thinking abilities than those without such exposure. In addition, attitudes toward philosophy emerged as a significant predictor of critical thinking performance among undergraduate students. These findings underscore the importance of philosophy in fostering reflective inquiry, analytical reasoning, and intellectual development within higher education.

Discussion of Findings

The findings revealed that a considerable proportion of undergraduate students perceive philosophy as a useless or impractical discipline. This result aligns with the observations of Nussbaum (2010), Biesta (2015), and Hand (2018), who noted that contemporary higher education systems increasingly emphasise vocational relevance, employability, and economic productivity, often at the expense of humanities disciplines. The prevalence of negative perceptions among undergraduate students suggests that philosophy continues to face challenges regarding its perceived relevance in an era dominated by career-oriented and market-driven educational priorities.

The study further demonstrated a significant positive relationship between undergraduate students' perceptions of philosophy and their critical thinking skills. Undergraduate students who valued philosophy exhibited stronger performance on the Watson–Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal than those who viewed philosophy negatively. This finding supports Dewey's (1933) proposition that reflective inquiry contributes significantly to intellectual development. The result suggests that positive attitudes towards philosophy encourage greater engagement in reflective thinking, intellectual exploration, and analytical reasoning, thereby enhancing critical thinking abilities.

The comparative analysis also revealed that undergraduate students exposed to philosophy courses significantly outperformed their counterparts without such exposure in critical thinking assessments. This result corroborates previous studies by Lipman (2003), Topping and Trickey (2007), Abrami et al. (2015), Daniel and Auriac (2011), and Gorard et al. (2015), all of whom reported that philosophical inquiry enhances reasoning abilities, judgement, argumentation skills, and cognitive development. The higher performance of philosophy-

exposed students provide empirical evidence that engagement with philosophical concepts and methods contributes positively to the development of higher-order thinking skills.

The regression analysis further indicated that attitudes toward philosophy constituted the strongest predictor of critical thinking performance among the variables examined. This suggests that undergraduate students' beliefs about the usefulness and relevance of philosophy may significantly influence their willingness to engage in reflective learning activities. Students who dismiss philosophy as irrelevant may inadvertently limit opportunities for developing analytical, evaluative, and problem-solving skills. Conversely, students who appreciate the intellectual value of philosophy are more likely to participate actively in reflective inquiry and critical discussions that strengthen reasoning abilities.

Overall, the findings reinforce the view that philosophy plays a vital role in cultivating the intellectual competencies required for academic success, lifelong learning, professional effectiveness, and democratic participation. The study demonstrates that perceptions of philosophy are not merely attitudinal dispositions but important factors that may influence students' intellectual engagement and critical thinking development within higher education.

Conclusion

The study concludes that undergraduate students' perceptions of philosophy significantly influence their critical thinking development. Negative attitudes toward philosophy are associated with lower critical thinking performance, whereas positive attitudes correspond with stronger reasoning abilities and higher levels of intellectual engagement. Furthermore, undergraduate students exposed to philosophy courses demonstrated significantly higher levels of critical thinking than their peers without such exposure.

The findings provide empirical support for the argument that philosophy remains an essential component of contemporary higher education and should not be dismissed as an impractical academic discipline. Rather, philosophy serves as a powerful intellectual tool for developing analytical reasoning, reflective judgement, argument evaluation, problem-solving abilities, and intellectual autonomy. The study further establishes that students' attitudes towards philosophy constitute an important predictor of critical thinking performance, highlighting the need to foster positive perceptions of philosophical inquiry within university environments.

Ultimately, the evidence suggests that philosophy contributes substantially to the preparation of graduates who are capable of thinking critically, evaluating

information responsibly, addressing complex problems, and participating effectively in contemporary society. Strengthening the place of philosophy within university education may therefore contribute significantly to the development of the intellectual capacities required in the twenty-first century.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Universities should strengthen the integration of philosophy courses within undergraduate programmes in order to enhance critical thinking, reflective inquiry, and analytical reasoning among students.
2. Higher education policymakers should recognise the contribution of philosophy to critical thinking development when designing curriculum reforms and graduate competency frameworks.
3. Lecturers should employ interactive philosophical dialogue, debate, reflective discussion, and inquiry-based learning strategies to increase students' engagement with philosophical ideas.
4. University authorities should organise seminars, workshops, and awareness programmes aimed at addressing misconceptions regarding the relevance and practical value of philosophy in contemporary society.
5. Universities should encourage interdisciplinary philosophy courses that are accessible to students from diverse academic disciplines, including the sciences, social sciences, engineering, health sciences, and business studies.
6. Higher education institutions should prioritise critical thinking instruction as a core graduate attribute and recognise philosophy as a valuable avenue for achieving this objective.
7. Curriculum developers should incorporate philosophical reasoning, ethics, and critical inquiry components into general education programmes to strengthen students' intellectual and civic competencies.
8. Further studies should investigate the long-term effects of philosophy education on academic achievement, professional competence, leadership development, and career outcomes among university graduates.
9. Future research should explore how factors such as academic discipline, year of study, and institutional context influence undergraduate

students' perceptions of philosophy and critical thinking development.

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