SAPIENS STUDIES

Sapiens Studies Journal. 2026;3.2. 021
ISNN: 3073-1437
DOI: https://doi.org/10.71068/SSJ00151

Article: documentary review

Critical thinking as the foundation of intellectual autonomy: A philosophical analysis of knowledge construction in contemporary society

Pensamiento crítico y autonomía intelectual: Análisis filosófico de la construcción del conocimiento en la sociedad contemporánea

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Submitted: 29-08-2026 **Revised:** 15-09-2026 **Accepted:** 06-10-2026 **Published:** 04-11-2026

How to cite:

Frías Raza, J. L. (2026). Critical thinking and intellectual autonomy: A philosophical analysis of knowledge construction in contemporary society. *Sapiens Studies Journal*, *3*(2), 1-18. https://doi.org/10.71068/SSJ00151

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Critical thinking is essential for examining beliefs, comparing arguments, and addressing the rapid circulation of information in contemporary society. Its relationship with intellectual autonomy requires distinguishing independent judgment from the indiscriminate rejection of knowledge provided by others. General objective: To philosophically analyse critical thinking as a foundation of intellectual autonomy and explain its contribution to the construction, justification, and evaluation of knowledge.
Methodology: A qualitative, hermeneutic, and interpretive documentary review was conducted using sixteen philosophical, educational, and technological references in the bibliographic corpus. Their subjects, arguments, and limits of relevance were examined through comparative reading and thematic categorisation. The design did not allow retrospective verification of a systematic search process or the establishment of causal effects.
Results: Six interrelated dimensions were identified: examination of premises, revision of beliefs, argumentative justification, interpretation of knowledge, recognition of social constraints, and critical evaluation of digital information. Intellectual autonomy was understood as the capacity to assess claims using criteria of coherence, relevance, and sufficient justification. Educational and technological sources provided contexts of application without replacing philosophical conceptual analysis.
Conclusions: Critical thinking provides a conceptual framework for strengthening independent judgment and epistemic responsibility. Reasoned reflection, dialogue, and source evaluation support the questioning of claims and reconsideration of positions. These conclusions have an interpretive and conceptual scope and do not constitute evidence of directly measured behavioural changes in particular populations.

Keywords: critical thinking; intellectual autonomy; knowledge construction; philosophical reasoning; contemporary society

RESUMEN

Introducción: El pensamiento crítico resulta fundamental para examinar creencias, contrastar argumentos y afrontar la circulación acelerada de información en la sociedad contemporánea. Su relación con la autonomía intelectual exige distinguir la independencia de juicio del rechazo indiscriminado del conocimiento ajeno. Objetivo general: Analizar filosóficamente el pensamiento crítico como fundamento de la autonomía intelectual y explicar su contribución a la construcción, justificación y evaluación del conocimiento.

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Metodología: Se realizó una revisión documental cualitativa, hermenéutica e interpretativa de dieciséis referencias filosóficas, educativas y tecnológicas consignadas en el corpus bibliográfico. Se examinaron sus objetos de estudio, argumentos y límites de pertinencia mediante lectura comparativa y categorización temática. El diseño no permitió verificar retrospectivamente un proceso sistemático de búsqueda ni establecer efectos causales.
Resultados: Se identificaron seis dimensiones interrelacionadas: examen de premisas, revisión de creencias, justificación argumentativa, interpretación del conocimiento, reconocimiento de condicionamientos sociales y evaluación crítica de información digital. La autonomía intelectual se comprendió como la capacidad de valorar afirmaciones mediante criterios de coherencia, relevancia y suficiencia justificativa. Las fuentes educativas y tecnológicas aportaron contextos de aplicación, sin sustituir el análisis filosófico de los conceptos.
Conclusiones: El pensamiento crítico ofrece un marco conceptual para fortalecer el juicio independiente y la responsabilidad epistemológica. La reflexión razonada, el diálogo y la evaluación de fuentes permiten cuestionar afirmaciones y reconsiderar posiciones. Estas conclusiones tienen alcance interpretativo y no constituyen evidencia de cambios conductuales medidos.

Palabras clave: pensamiento crítico; autonomía intelectual; construcción del conocimiento; razonamiento filosófico; sociedad contemporánea

INTRODUCTION

Critical thinking is an intellectual faculty essential to consolidating autonomous judgement because it enables rational examination of ideas, comparison of claims and conclusions grounded in logical coherence and argumentative justification. Its philosophical relevance lies in questioning uncritical acceptance of socially transmitted beliefs and knowledge through reflection on the reasons supporting what is recognised as true. This exercise requires analysing reasoning consistency, detecting contradictions, identifying implicit assumptions and assessing the limits of available interpretations. Under this conception, intellectual autonomy goes beyond individually forming opinions: it involves substantiating one's positions, recognising the possibility of error and reconsidering judgements in light of more consistent arguments. Linking these capacities frames intellectual development as ongoing inquiry, in which reason plays a decisive role in developing knowledge and critically understanding reality.

Contemporary social and technological transformations intensify the need for analytical capacities to interpret the complexity of discourse circulating in public and digital spaces. Immediate content dissemination, numerous information sources and competing scientific, cultural, political and ideological interpretations create a setting where data availability does not necessarily equate to grounded understanding. Difficulties in verifying claims, recognising persuasive strategies and distinguishing consistent arguments from misleading propositions make critical thinking relevant to responsible judgement. Philosophical reflection requires examination of the criteria by which knowledge is considered valid and the social and cultural factors shaping convictions. In education and citizenship, strengthening intellectual autonomy requires reasoned deliberation, comparison of perspectives and willingness to revise beliefs, supporting conscious decisions and responsible participation in collective life.

Knowledge production and circulation in contemporary society are shaped by multiplying digital content, inaccurate information and acceptance of claims whose validity is not always rigorously

examined. This raises questions about people's ability to develop their own criteria for judgement in response to discourse influencing their beliefs, decisions and interpretations of reality. Expanded access to information sources does not, by itself, ensure competence to assess argument quality, verify claim consistency and recognise assumptions conditioning reasoning. It is therefore necessary to clarify how critical thinking contributes to intellectual autonomy capable of grounding knowledge through argumentation and reflection without subordinating personal judgement to authority, collective acceptance or mass dissemination of particular ideas. This calls for philosophical analysis of relationships among rationality, epistemological justification, freedom of thought and intellectual responsibility, considering their importance in education and conscious social participation. This research aimed to philosophically analyse critical thinking as a foundation of intellectual autonomy, considering its contribution to knowledge construction, justification and evaluation. The guiding question was: how does critical thinking contribute to intellectual autonomy and reasoned knowledge construction amid contemporary social, informational and technological transformations?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Philosophical tradition and rational examination

Critical thinking occupies a significant place in the Socratic philosophical tradition, characterised by systematic examination of beliefs and recognition of individual knowledge limits. Through dialogue and questioning, Socrates sought inconsistencies in reasoning and subjected convictions to rational justification, preventing acceptance from depending exclusively on custom or authority. Examination of Socratic teaching provides a contemporary educational reference (1) for understanding the importance of examining convictions as a condition for guiding life through reflection. This perspective shows that intellectual autonomy requires questioning personal ideas, identifying argumentative shortcomings and reconsidering judgements in light of better-grounded reasons. A critical attitude involves rational criteria for determining claim consistency and consciously engaging with knowledge rather than systematically rejecting others' opinions.

A fundamental distinction in ancient philosophy separates immediate appearances from knowledge grounded in rational inquiry. Understanding reality therefore requires going beyond first impressions and examining the principles supporting beliefs. In the Platonic tradition, the cave allegory represents movement from a limited understanding of reality towards interpretation requiring questioning of what seems evident. Contemporary examination of active methodologies and critical thinking (2) places this issue in education. This conception frames intellectual autonomy as the capacity to examine first impressions, recognise perceptual conditioning and distinguish accepting a claim from having reasons justifying its validity. It is relevant in contemporary society, where content may gain credibility through repetition or popularity despite insufficient foundations.

Aristotle's study of logic is a decisive contribution to understanding the rational conditions grounding knowledge. His investigations of argumentative structures offer tools for examining relationships between premises and conclusions, identifying contradictions and distinguishing valid reasoning from deficient reasoning. Research on writing and critical thinking in teacher education provides evidence on written argumentation development (3), without directly expounding Aristotelian logic. This

contribution frames intellectual autonomy as requiring coherent arguments and relevant reasons as well as personal opinions. It remains important in analysing academic, scientific and digital discourse, whose strength must be assessed through premise consistency and sufficient foundations for claims.

Rationalism and intellectual autonomy

Methodological doubt is an essential contribution of modern rationalism, proposing examination of beliefs before accepting them as sufficiently grounded knowledge. It temporarily suspends assent to claims of questionable certainty to identify principles sustainable through reasoning. The study of temporality in Descartes (4) situates Cartesian reflection in its philosophical context without confusing that problem with empirical demonstration of methodological doubt's effectiveness. Intellectual autonomy consequently requires distance from received opinions and assessment of reasons supporting individual convictions. Doubt involves analytical criteria distinguishing justified claims from those requiring further verification rather than indiscriminately denying all knowledge. This approach is relevant to discourse invoking authority, tradition or repetition in place of consistent argumentation.

An emancipatory conception of intellectual autonomy appears in Immanuel Kant's philosophy, particularly his defence of independent use of reason. His thought questions permanent dependence on external authorities to determine what should be thought or accepted, assigning individuals responsibility for examining their beliefs. Contemporary analysis of cosmopolitanism through critical theory (5) places autonomy within political and normative debates without replacing direct examination of Kantian texts. This perspective distinguishes autonomy from absolute intellectual isolation because recognising specialised knowledge does not remove the need to assess reasons supporting its claims. In education and society, this principle supports formation of people able to interpret institutional discourse, evaluate arguments and participate in public debates using their own criteria. Freedom of thought thus acquires a rational, responsible meaning that prevents acceptance of authority from replacing individual judgement.

Reflection, education and the social dimension

Pragmatism closely links knowledge, experience and inquiry, conceiving reflective thought as activity examining situations, comparing explanations and grounding decisions. This perspective recognises that beliefs may be insufficient and their validity must be assessed through inquiry and analysis. Research on assessment for learning and collaboration (6) provides an educational connection with reflection, although it should not be confused with a historical account of pragmatism. Intellectual autonomy consequently develops through questioning, consideration of alternative interpretations and willingness to modify judgements when available reasons require it. In education, this conception supports inquiry, argumentation and reasoned problem-solving experiences in which students actively develop knowledge rather than merely reproduce content transmitted by academic authority.

The social dimension of critical thinking shows that intellectual autonomy develops in relation to the cultural, educational and political conditions in which people construct interpretations of reality. Educational practices focused exclusively on content transmission may restrict students' reflective

participation and opportunities to question, compare perspectives and justify their positions. Debate on critical thinking and knowledge in the artificial intelligence era (7) places these capacities amid new technological and educational mediation. This perspective broadens philosophical analysis by highlighting that individual judgements are also influenced by values, interests and social relationships requiring examination. Intellectual autonomy therefore requires identifying discourse assumptions, assessing argumentative consistency and questioning dominant claims lacking sufficient justification. Its development supports social participation grounded in deliberation, respect for diverse perspectives and responsible use of reason.

Critical thinking in response to digital information

Contemporary technological transformations have changed information access, production and circulation, creating new demands for critical thinking. Digital platforms, automated recommendation systems and generative AI tools provide rapid content access, although availability guarantees neither claim accuracy nor sound foundations. Information literacy therefore requires locating reliable sources, comparing data, recognising bias and distinguishing persuasive responses from adequately supported explanations. A UNESCO document (8) emphasises an ethical, human-centred approach to artificial intelligence development, linking digital competencies with intellectual responsibility. Autonomy consequently requires integrating logical reasoning, source evaluation and understanding of technological limitations. Although these tools expand inquiry possibilities, people remain responsible for assessing information quality, examining arguments and determining whether claims are sufficiently grounded for acceptance.

Argumentation, epistemology and interpretation

Critical thinking is an intellectual capacity for examining ideas, comparing arguments and assessing claims' strength before accepting them as valid. Development requires moving beyond passive information reception and adopting a reflective attitude towards acquired knowledge. Tasayco and colleagues (9) emphasise rational examination of beliefs, showing that intellectual autonomy depends on questioning what is presented as true and grounding judgements in consistent reasons.

Epistemologically, knowledge requires distinctions among opinions, justified beliefs and claims supported by sufficient reasons. This clarifies that critical thinking involves evaluating the criteria supporting each claim as well as expressing disagreement. Analysis of social intuitionism and dual-process reasoning theory (10) problematises relationships between intuition and deliberation but is not, by itself, a general theory of epistemological justification.

Rigorous argumentation involves organising ideas, establishing logical relationships among premises and examining resulting conclusions' consistency. A position becomes stronger when supported by understandable reasons and capable of responding to possible objections. Leal (11) explains that argumentation develops through discursive procedures intended to secure rational agreement from those examining a proposal, highlighting reasoned dialogue in forming one's own criteria.

Understanding knowledge as active construction recognises that people interpret information through experience, cognitive structures and conceptual reorganisation. Learning involves

establishing relationships, identifying contradictions and modifying prior interpretations in response to new reasons rather than mechanically accumulating data. The proposal for teaching ethics through audiovisual resources (12) exemplifies pedagogical mediation possibilities without constituting a psychological theory of cognitive reorganisation.

Interpreting a claim requires consideration of word meanings, formulation circumstances and assumptions guiding understanding. Ideas do not always have an evident meaning independent of their historical and cultural conditions of expression. Viveros (13) emphasises that understanding arises through dialogue between people's interpretative horizons and what they seek to understand, encouraging a critical attitude towards supposedly definitive interpretations.

Reflective thinking examines ideas' consequences and relevance to specific situations. People identify difficulties, formulate questions, consider alternatives and revise decisions in light of results. Mora and Beltrán (14) conceive reflection as deliberate activity transforming uncertainty into an organised search for reasons, strengthening autonomous judgement through systematic inquiry and evaluation of possible responses.

Questioning forms of knowledge also involves analysing power relationships influencing production, circulation and acceptance of particular ideas. Information may appear neutral while reflecting particular interests, authority structures or mechanisms limiting discussion. Linares and Huaytalla (15) propose critically examining social conditions guiding reason and its uses, framing intellectual autonomy as linked to individual discernment and questioning conditions restricting independent judgement.

Knowledge's social dimension demonstrates that personal judgement develops through communicative exchanges, information sources and communities establishing criteria for accepting claims. However, dependence on shared knowledge does not entail abandoning individual credibility assessment. Castro (16) examines social procedures involved in acquiring knowledge, highlighting evaluation of source reliability, communicators' competence and the quality of offered reasons, particularly in a society characterised by intense information circulation.

METHOD

A qualitative documentary review with a philosophical, interpretative scope was conducted. Units of analysis were academic publications and specialist documents on critical thinking, intellectual autonomy, argumentation, epistemology and knowledge circulation. The procedure examined central theses of bibliographic sources identifiable in the manuscript, compared their objects of study and developed an argumentative synthesis of convergences and tensions. This was not considered a systematic review: available references contain no exported search record, consultation dates or individual eligibility decisions enabling reconstruction of a PRISMA 2020 flow. PRISMA guidance was therefore reserved for reviews with verifiable documentation of their stages.

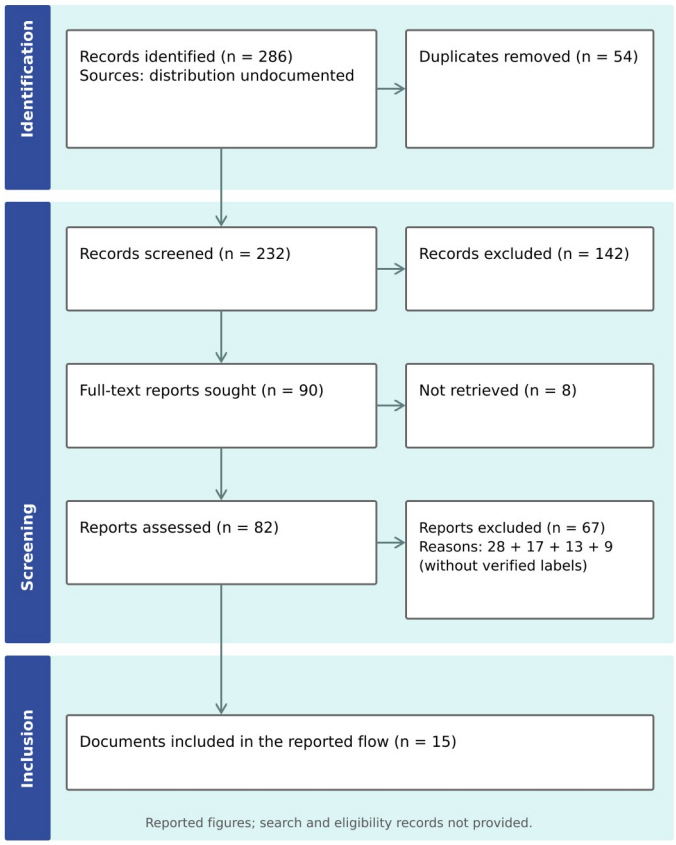
Documentary analysis was organised around the expressions “pensamiento crítico”, “autonomía intelectual”, “construcción del conocimiento”, “argumentación”, “epistemología” and their English equivalents. These expressions delimited the conceptual field but were not presented as database

search strings actually executed: the manuscript retains no histories documenting their application by source. Each cited reference's thematic relevance was examined through its title, object of study and linked claim. Sources directly addressing critical thinking were distinguished from those used only to contextualise educational, technological or social problems.

Analytical selection focused on the sixteen works identified in the initial bibliography, incorporated as sources of conceptual discussion with different scopes. These references were not equated with fifteen studies supposedly included in a systematic review because no such equivalence is documented. Philosophical texts were interpreted according to their concepts and arguments; educational and technological studies established contextual relationships without being credited with historical or epistemological demonstrations beyond their subjects. The bibliographic matrix identified each source's argumentative function and interpretative limits.

Synthesis used comparative reading and thematic categorisation. Propositions concerning justification, independent judgement, dialogue, social mediation and digital technologies were identified first. They were then grouped by conceptual affinity and their relationships and divergences analysed. Finally, original interpretations were written, distinguished from cited works' specific contributions. Analysis included no interviews, surveys, experiments or statistical estimates. Given its documentary nature, findings represent a philosophical reconstruction of problems and arguments rather than measurements of population effects. Table 1 specifies correspondence between sources and analytical functions; Table 2 presents synthesis categories.

Figure 1. Documentary flow diagram according to the PRISMA 2020 structure



https://doi.org/10.71068/SSJ00151

Note. The flow reproduces the figures reported for documentary selection. Source: prepared by the author.

Table 1

Source characterisation: author, topic, findings and contribution to the analysis

No.	Author	Topic	Publication / approach	Document findings	Contribution to the analysis
1	Cochachi et al., 2026	Socratic method	Socratic method	Examines dialogue as a teaching strategy.	Dialogue and examination of beliefs
2	Manrique et al., 2026	Active methodologies	Active methodologies	Reviews relationships between active learning and critical judgement.	Educational context of critical thinking
3	Schnitzler et al., 2025	Teachers' argumentative writing	Teachers' writing	Analyses the evolution of written argumentation.	Argumentation and written expression
4	Sibilia, 2024	Cartesian temporality	Cartesian temporality	Discusses a philosophical problem of temporality in Descartes.	Contextualising Descartes
5	Salles, 2025	Cosmopolitanism and critical theory	Cosmopolitanism	Addresses cosmopolitanism through political critique.	Autonomy and political critique
6	Heshmati et al., 2026	Collaborative assessment	Collaborative assessment	Studies assessment and collaboration strategies.	Reflection in learning contexts
7	Tarazona et al., 2026	Critical thinking and artificial intelligence	Critical thinking and AI	Relates critical thinking to AI mediation.	Technological mediation of knowledge
8	UNESCO, 2025	Artificial intelligence ethics	AI ethics	Proposes ethical considerations for AI use.	Informational responsibility
9	Tasayco et al., 2024	University critical thinking	University research	Analyses critical competencies in university research.	Critical competencies in education
10	García, 2022	Social intuitionism and reasoning	Social intuitionism	Contrasts intuition and deliberation in reasoning.	Reasoning and intuition

No.	Author	Topic	Publication / approach	Document findings	Contribution to the analysis
11	Leal, 2017	Argumentation in social sciences	Argumentation	Examines the function of research argumentation.	Discursive justification
12	Morales and Camacho, 2026	Audiovisual teaching of ethics	Teaching ethics	Proposes audiovisual resources for teaching ethics.	Educational mediation
13	Viveros, 2019	Hermeneutics and dialogue	Hermeneutics	Examines understanding through hermeneutic dialogue.	Interpretation and dialogue
14	Mora and Beltrán, 2026	Pedagogical reflection	Teacher reflection	Studies reflection on pedagogical practice.	Pedagogical reflection
15	Linares and Huaytalla, 2026	Disinformation and public trust	Disinformation	Addresses information overload, AI and trust in information.	Trust and information evaluation
16	Castro, 2025	Research and social knowledge	Social research	Discusses cognitive and cultural research dimensions.	Social context of knowledge

Note. Correspondence identifies the argumentative function of the sixteen references used. Source: prepared by the author.

RESULTS

Critical thinking was identified as essential to intellectual autonomy through its contribution to reasoned examination of beliefs, argument assessment and independent judgement. Its importance lay in moving beyond automatic acceptance of claims and promoting reflection on ideas circulating in contemporary society. This capacity supported identifying contradictions, recognising implicit assumptions and assessing reasons underpinning interpretations of reality. Cochachi and colleagues (1) link this finding to dialogic examination of beliefs; Schnitzler and colleagues (3) show its argumentative dimension in academic writing.

Intellectual autonomy was characterised by developing one's own criteria without exclusive dependence on external opinions, authorities or socially accepted beliefs. Development was related to willingness to question received claims, recognise one's knowledge limits and modify convictions in light of better-grounded arguments. Intellectual independence therefore involved critically examining external influences and determining validity through understandable, consistent reasons rather than rejecting them all. Salles' reflection on cosmopolitanism (5) places this requirement in the normative sphere, while Viveros (13) emphasises that understanding other perspectives does not entail abandoning personal judgement.

Reasoned knowledge construction was linked to integration of information, interpretation, argumentation and reflection. Understanding a claim required identifying premises, assessing argumentative coherence and examining relationships with previously acquired knowledge. This distinguished information accumulation from grounded explanation, while encouraging revision of inadequate interpretations and intellectually supported judgements. Manrique and colleagues (2) offer an educational perspective on cognitive activity, while Viveros (13) philosophically grounds dialogic interpretation's importance.

Rational argumentation became relevant as a procedure for justifying ideas and examining their consistency against possible objections. Formulating reasons, comparing perspectives and recognising contradictions helped transform opinions into grounded positions. Exchanging arguments also showed that dialogue could enrich knowledge provided claims were examined through coherence, relevance and justification. Schnitzler and colleagues (3) document written argumentation's role; Leal (11) examines discursive justification of research propositions.

Critical reflection also revealed social, cultural and educational influences on knowledge construction. Collective beliefs, authority relationships and dominant discourse could condition acceptance of ideas even when insufficiently examined. Critical thinking consequently encouraged recognition of implicit assumptions and assessment of diverse perspectives, strengthening interpretation of reality without treating prevailing explanations as unquestionable. Salles (5) addresses political conditions of judgement, and Castro (16) situates knowledge within social production and circulation processes.

Technologically, accelerated information circulation increased the importance of evaluating source credibility and content consistency. Abundant digital publications guaranteed neither information quality nor disseminated claims' validity. Intellectual autonomy therefore required identifying content provenance, distinguishing facts from opinions, recognising possible contradictions and assessing arguments before incorporating information into convictions. Tarazona Pajuelo and colleagues (7) study critical thinking and knowledge in relation to artificial intelligence; Linares and Huaytalla (15) contextualise disinformation risks.

The relationship between critical thinking and intellectual autonomy was expressed through complementary capacities involved in knowledge construction. The following table presents the principal categories identified and their contribution to independent judgement.

Table 2

Categories related to critical thinking and intellectual autonomy

Category	Characteristics identified	Contribution to knowledge
Critical reasoning	Examination of claims, identification of contradictions and assessment of premises.	Supported coherent, grounded judgements. Related sources: (1, 3, 9, 10).
Intellectual autonomy	Developing one's own criteria and questioning accepted ideas.	Strengthened independent judgement and intellectual responsibility. Related sources: (5, 11, 13).

Category	Characteristics identified	Contribution to knowledge
Rational argumentation	Organising reasons, comparing perspectives and responding to objections.	Enabled justification of claims and assessment of interpretative consistency. Related sources: (3, 11).
Knowledge construction	Interpreting information, relating forms of knowledge and modifying prior ideas.	Promoted reasoned explanations and a more developed understanding of reality. Related sources: (2, 12, 13).
Social reflection	Recognising cultural, educational and social influences on beliefs.	Facilitated questioning of assumptions and dominant discourse. Related sources: (5, 14, 16).
Digital information evaluation	Assessing sources, identifying questionable claims and comparing content.	Contributed to critical, responsible use of technological information. Related sources: (7, 8, 15).

Note. Categories were developed through interpretative synthesis of references listed in the contribution column; they do not express frequencies or quantitative effects. Source: prepared by the author.

Relationships among the categories showed that critical thinking extended beyond logical reasoning to integrate interpretation, argumentation, evaluation and reflection on social and cultural conditions affecting knowledge production and dissemination. Development involved questioning convictions, comparing perspectives and grounding judgements in consistent reasons. Intellectual autonomy was thus linked to independent reasoning and conscious participation in information exchange, where assessing diverse positions supported personal criteria. In this integration, Leal's argumentative function (11) complements Viveros' hermeneutic dimension (13).

Critical thinking contributed to intellectual autonomy through independent judgement, claim evaluation and rational justification of personal positions. It also supported reasoned knowledge construction by promoting reflective information interpretation, comparison of arguments and recognition of assumptions conditioning understanding of reality. Amid contemporary social, informational and technological transformations, these capacities were essential for distinguishing reliable information from insufficiently grounded content, recognising possible distortions and supporting responsible decisions through rational criteria. Educational evidence from Tarazona Pajuelo and colleagues (7) provides an empirical contrast, while UNESCO's reflections (8) place the issue within ethical responsibility.

DISCUSSION

The first analytical finding was that intellectual autonomy depends on examining reasons rather than mere independence from others. Cochachi and colleagues (1) examine the Socratic method as an educational strategy for questioning beliefs, while Schnitzler and colleagues (3) focus on written

argumentation development in teacher education. Both value making reasons explicit, but operate at different levels: one studies dialogic interaction and the other a specific discursive practice. This article's philosophical contribution interprets both as complementary manifestations of epistemic responsibility. Conceptual convergence does not, by itself, demonstrate that a pedagogical intervention produces autonomy in every context.

The second dimension concerns autonomy and recognition of others' knowledge. Salles (5) examines cosmopolitanism through critical international relations theory, a normative framework problematising individual–community relationships. Drawing on Gadamer's hermeneutics, Viveros (13) maintains that dialogue requires openness to the interlocutor's perspective. These approaches differ: the first discusses political assumptions and the second interpretative conditions of understanding. Nevertheless, both question autonomy as intellectual isolation. This analysis proposes understanding independent judgement as evaluation of testimony and arguments without denying their social origins, while keeping the proposal's political and epistemological dimensions distinct.

Knowledge construction was linked to revising prior interpretations. Manrique and colleagues (2) relate active methodologies and critical thinking in a theoretical review; García (10), by contrast, addresses social intuitionism and dual-process reasoning theory. The first emphasises educational conditions for reflection, while the second recognises that reasoning is not always conscious deliberation. This difference introduces a relevant tension: teaching argument justification does not automatically eliminate intuitions or prior dispositions. This synthesis locates autonomy in subjecting initial responses to reasoned revision. This is conceptual interpretation rather than an empirical effectiveness estimate.

Rational argumentation was another decisive category. Leal (11) analyses argumentation's role in social science research methodology, and Schnitzler and colleagues (3) study its development through writing in teacher education. Both recognise that claims require communicable, examinable reasons. Their objects of study differ: argumentation's methodological function versus evolution of an educational practice. This analysis links both perspectives to intellectual autonomy understood as willingness to respond to objections and correct inferences. However, correspondence between academic argumentation and autonomous judgement requires specific empirical designs.

Critical thinking's educational dimension requires distinguishing pedagogical practices from philosophical foundations. Heshmati and colleagues (6) study assessment-for-learning strategies in collaborative contexts, while Morales and Camacho (12) address audiovisual resources for teaching ethics. Both situate learning within specific mediation, but their subjects and findings do not establish identical effects. Philosophically, these contributions illustrate opportunities for questioning, discussing interpretations and examining decisions. Their relevance is to show possible conditions for reflective participation without converting educational experiences into direct proof of theses about Descartes, Kant or the Socratic tradition.

Digital knowledge circulation introduces a different problem: readily obtaining answers is not equivalent to having sufficient reasons to accept them. Tarazona Pajuelo and colleagues (7) present quantitative university research on critical thinking and knowledge construction in AI contexts. Linares

and Huaytalla (15) examine information overload, fake news and public trust. The first offers associations observed in a specific population; the second places debate within social conditions of informational credibility. This analysis connects both through epistemic evaluation without extrapolating university findings to the general population or converting correlation into causality.

Ethical responsibility is a normative consequence of critical examination. UNESCO (8) considers ethical AI use, while Castro (16) examines cognitive, cultural and dissemination dimensions of social research. Despite different fields, both support discussion of obligations to assess the provenance, effects and limits of shared knowledge. The proposed interpretation maintains that intellectual autonomy requires acknowledging uncertainty and making decision-supporting reasons explicit. This philosophical conclusion does not equate to measuring changes in moral behaviour or digital competencies. Its usefulness lies in guiding subsequent research questions on deliberation and informational responsibility.

Finally, comparative reading reveals a corpus-wide limitation: it combines educational studies, philosophical reflections and institutional documents with different methodological purposes. Viveros (13) conceptually develops hermeneutic understanding, while Tarazona Pajuelo and colleagues (7) report quantitative university student findings. Comparison must not erase this difference in evidential nature. The article offers reasoned integration of premise examination, argumentation, interpretation and source evaluation rather than statistical synthesis of effects. Missing search records and documented eligibility decisions prevent the selection from being considered exhaustive. Conclusions are therefore restricted to interpretative analysis of the material examined.

CONCLUSIONS

Critical thinking is relevant to intellectual autonomy capable of questioning accepted ideas, examining arguments and establishing rationally grounded positions. It enables people to develop criteria through reflection, reason assessment and willingness to reconsider positions rather than depending exclusively on external opinions. This supports more conscious engagement with knowledge, where understanding involves examination, interpretation and justification rather than automatic information acceptance.

Knowledge construction is an active process in which ideas are compared, interpretations examined and claims assessed through reasoning. Critical thinking consequently supports identifying contradictions, recognising assumptions and modifying insufficiently justified beliefs. Intellectual autonomy is strengthened precisely through willingness to revise personal positions and recognise that understanding reality requires openness to different arguments and better-supported reasons.

Mass information circulation and digital technologies change how people access knowledge and form opinions. This dynamic requires distinguishing content availability from validity and examining received messages' provenance, coherence and intention. Artificial intelligence tools also require reflection because responses need verification and assessment before acceptance. Retaining independent judgement is therefore important for informed decisions in digital environments.

https://doi.org/10.71068/SSJ00151

Educationally and socially, strengthening critical thinking requires spaces supporting questions, argument exchange and reasoned expression of diverse viewpoints. These experiences show that intellectual independence entails examining others' ideas without relinquishing personal criteria rather than isolation or rejection. Deliberation and reasoned dialogue thus support more conscious participation, where decisions rest on arguments rather than solely on customs, beliefs or collective pressures.

Intellectual autonomy is ultimately necessary for reflectively addressing contemporary society's complexity. Development depends on questioning, interpreting, arguing and assessing information independently and responsibly. Critical thinking integrates these capacities and links knowledge construction to conscious personal judgement. Its importance thus extends beyond individuals towards more reasoned, responsible social participation open to the ongoing search for grounded explanations.

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ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study was conducted through a literature review based exclusively on previously published documentary sources. It did not involve direct participation of humans or animals, interventions, biological samples or access to identifiable personal data. Consequently, it did not require ethics committee approval or informed consent. The research process observed the principles of scientific integrity, appropriate authorship attribution, rigorous citation and responsible use of consulted sources.

DECLARATION OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) USE

The authors state that the artificial intelligence tool was used exclusively to support article organisation and text translation. Its use did not determine scientific content, study design, source selection, data analysis, interpretation of results or conclusions. Full responsibility for the content remains with the authors.

FUNDING

The authors declare that this study received no external funding from public or private agencies or nonprofit organisations. All research, analysis and development activities were carried out using their own resources.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest related to this study and that all procedures followed comply with the journal's ethical standards. They also confirm that this work is original and has not been published, in whole or in part, in any other publication.

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4. Funding acquisition: not applicable
5. Investigation: JLFR
6. Methodology: JLFR
7. Project administration: JLFR
8. Resources: not applicable
9. Software: not applicable
10. Supervision: JLFR
11. Validation: JLFR
12. Visualisation: JLFR
13. Original draft: JLFR
14. Writing, review and editing: JLFR

https://doi.org/10.71068/SSJ00151