frontiers in Education

TYPE Original Research
PUBLISHED 10 April 2026
DOI 10.3389/feduc.2026.1797120

OPEN ACCESS

EDITED BY
Vanessa Ortega-Quevedo,
Complutense University of Madrid, Spain

REVIEWED BY
Ijeoma Ukeni,
University of Huddersfield, United Kingdom
Irwandani Irwandani,
Raden Intan State Islamic University, Indonesia

*CORRESPONDENCE
Tamaralaiyefa Harold Tiemo
tiemoharold01@gmail.com
Ansarullah Tantry
ansarullah.tantry@actvet.gov.ae

RECEIVED 27 January 2026
REVISED 08 March 2026
ACCEPTED 17 March 2026
PUBLISHED 10 April 2026

CITATION
Tiemo TH, Gilani SAM, Tantry A, Armosh F, Lihe R and Askri S (2026) Exploring criticality in Nigerian business education: curriculum, pedagogy, and graduate formation.
Front. Educ. 11:1797120.
doi: 10.3389/feduc.2026.1797120

Exploring criticality in Nigerian business education: curriculum, pedagogy, and graduate formation

Tamaralaiyefa Harold Tiemo[1]*, Sayed Abdul Majid Gilani[2], Ansarullah Tantry[3]*, Firas Armosh[4], Raymond Lihe[5] and Soumaya Askri[6]

[1]Global Banking Business School, Manchester, United Kingdom, [2]Birmingham City Business School, Birmingham City University, Birmingham, United Kingdom, [3]Department of Psychology, Fatima College of Health Sciences, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, [4]Coventry University Business School, Coventry University, Coventry, United Kingdom, [5]School of Business and Law, De Montfort University - Dubai Campus, Dubai, United Arab Emirates, [6]School of Management, Canadian University Dubai, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Introduction: Criticality is widely recognized as central to contemporary business education, yet how it is understood and enacted in Nigerian universities remains underexamined. This study defines criticality as a pedagogical orientation integrating analytical judgment, reflexive awareness, ethical evaluation, and questioning of dominant assumptions in professional contexts.
Methods: Using phenomenology and narrative inquiry, interviews were conducted with 28 business educators from federal, state, and private universities in Nigeria.
Results: Analysis revealed four themes: varied understandings of criticality, pedagogical improvisation under constraint, criticality as educator identity, and institutional and regional influences.
Discussion: Criticality emerged not as a standardized graduate skill but as a situated pedagogical practice shaped by educators' values, institutional conditions, and socio-cultural context. The study reconceptualizes criticality in business education and identifies institutional reforms required to support pedagogical agency and culturally responsive curriculum design.

KEYWORDS
business education, critical pedagogy, criticality, graduate identity, institutional context, Nigeria

Introduction

Business education is increasingly expected to move beyond the transmission of technical knowledge toward preparing graduates who can interpret complexity, exercise judgment, and respond ethically to organizational and societal challenges. Central to this expectation is criticality. In this study, criticality is defined as a pedagogical orientation that integrates analytical judgment, reflexive awareness, ethical evaluation, and the questioning of dominant assumptions in professional contexts. The study therefore distinguishes criticality from narrower conceptions of critical thinking as a discrete cognitive skill. While critical thinking remains one component of criticality, the concept extends further by integrating critique, reflexivity, and ethical responsibility into professional learning and identity formation (Barnett, 1997; Brookfield, 2017; Cunliffe, 2016). Davies (2015) similarly argues that critical thinking in higher education must be

understood within broader intellectual and educational practices rather than as an isolated reasoning skill. Recent scholarship further emphasizes that criticality involves reflexive engagement with power, values, and knowledge in professional contexts rather than purely technical reasoning (Pettersson, 2023; Zembylas, 2024).

In Nigeria, business education occupies a dual role. It is positioned both as an engine of economic growth and as part of a broader postcolonial educational system shaped by imported knowledge traditions and policy models. This context complicates efforts to foster criticality, as teaching is mediated by entrenched curricula, assessment regimes, and institutional cultures that may privilege compliance over questioning (Banerjee, 2022; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Examining how educators define and enact criticality in such settings is essential for understanding how business schools can prepare graduates for the ethical and strategic dimensions of practice while also addressing issues of fairness and local relevance in higher education (Clarke, 2018; Luckett and Shay, 2020).

International scholarship in critical management education (CME) has long challenged mainstream market-driven approaches to business teaching and advocated participatory, reflective, and socially engaged learning (Cunliffe, 2016; Dehler et al., 2001; Grey, 2004). These approaches position students as active participants who interrogate prevailing business logics rather than passively absorb them. They also emphasize that criticality extends beyond cognitive skill and develops through relationships among values, teaching context, and institutional conditions. Although these ideas have been widely examined in European, North American, and Australasian contexts, comparatively little empirical research explores how they operate within Global South business schools, where postcolonial histories and governance structures shape distinct educational opportunities and constraints (Banerjee, 2022; Nkomo, 2011).

The employability literature reinforces the importance of integrating criticality into higher education by framing graduate readiness as a process of identity formation that incorporates values, social engagement, and moral judgment (Hinchliffe and Jolly, 2011; Tomlinson, 2017). Rather than treating employability as a fixed skill set, this literature presents it as a developmental process in which technical competence must be combined with reflective capacity, career self-management, and ethical sensitivity (Bridgstock, 2009; Yorke, 2006). In business education, this requires pedagogies that connect disciplinary knowledge with questions of purpose, responsibility, and long-term impact.

In the Global South, the cultivation of such dispositions is shaped by structural legacies and resource constraints. Higher education systems often reproduce Eurocentric epistemologies that marginalize indigenous knowledge and local perspectives (Andreotti, 2011; Nkomo, 2011). Curriculum reforms that ignore these hierarchies risk reproducing inequities while claiming to promote innovation. Nigerian universities also operate within regulatory frameworks that limit institutional autonomy and restrict academic freedom, making it difficult for educators to adopt flexible approaches to teaching criticality (Luckett and Shay, 2020).

Research focused on Nigeria underscores the persistence of these challenges. Studies have documented business curricula that neglect transferable skills such as critical thinking and communication (Edet and Udida, 2019), a continued emphasis on theory over practice (Edet, 2020), and institutional barriers including large class sizes, limited staff training, and bureaucratic inertia (Ajadi, 2024). Other work on business education in Nigeria similarly highlights pressure to align curricula with employability and global relevance, often without equivalent attention to critical and reflective development (Ikpesu, 2017). More recent research indicates that active and practice-oriented pedagogies can strengthen learner independence and applied capability in Nigerian higher education contexts, while employers increasingly expect graduates to demonstrate critical thinking and innovation (Okolie et al., 2022). Despite this recognition, a persistent gap remains between educational outcomes and workplace expectations.

Existing scholarship confirms the importance of critical thinking and critique in higher education, but much of it still concentrates on outcomes, curriculum design, survey-based perceptions, or broad policy discussion rather than close examination of how educators interpret and enact criticality in everyday teaching practice (Aston, 2023; Calma and Davies, 2021; D'Northwood and Rattray, 2025). Within Nigerian and wider Global South scholarship, the emphasis is similarly placed on employability, curriculum reform, graduate skills, or institutional constraints, with far less empirical attention to lecturers' lived pedagogical work and the meanings they attach to criticality in the classroom (Ajadi, 2024; Edet and Udida, 2019; Okolie et al., 2022). This omission matters because lecturers' interpretations shape what kinds of questioning, reflection, dialogue, and ethical judgment become possible for students, especially in contexts where formal guidance on critical pedagogy is limited or inconsistent.

This study addresses that gap by exploring how Nigerian business lecturers define and teach criticality, and how institutional, cultural, and structural conditions influence their practice. By focusing on lecturers' lived experiences, the study captures how criticality is negotiated, adapted, and sometimes constrained within Nigerian higher education. The research is guided by two questions: *How is criticality defined and taught within business management courses in Nigerian universities? What institutional, cultural, and teaching-related factors shape educators' ability to enact criticality in business education?*

In responding to these questions, the study makes two contributions. Conceptually, the study reconceptualizes criticality in business education as a situated and ethically grounded practice shaped by educators' professional identities and institutional contexts. In doing so, it extends debates in critical pedagogy, CME, postcolonial curriculum theory, epistemic justice, and graduate identity beyond universal models of critical thinking. Methodologically, the study demonstrates the value of combining phenomenology and narrative inquiry to examine how educators interpret criticality and how their pedagogical practices and professional identities evolve over time. This approach reveals forms of ethical labor, emotional resilience, and pedagogical improvisation that are often overlooked in performance-driven evaluations of teaching.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. The next section outlines the theoretical framework and contextual conditions shaping Nigerian higher education. This is followed by the methodology and findings examining how Nigerian business educators interpret and enact criticality in practice. The

paper then presents the discussion, contributions, and implications for policy, practice, and future research before concluding.

Theoretical background

Criticality in higher education has been examined across several scholarly traditions that analyse how knowledge, ethics, and identity are shaped within educational practice. In business education, these perspectives position criticality as more than a cognitive skill; it is a relational and value-laden orientation shaped by institutional logics and historical conditions. This section draws on five intersecting theoretical domains: critical pedagogy and dialogic practice, CME and professional ethics, postcolonial curriculum theory and knowledge hierarchies, epistemic justice and educational practice, and graduate identity and critical dispositions. These perspectives provide the conceptual foundation for examining how criticality is interpreted and enacted in Nigerian business education.

Critical pedagogy and dialogic practice

Freire (2020) rejects the banking model of education in which students passively receive knowledge. Instead, he proposes a dialogic process that encourages learners to reflect on their social reality and act upon it. Within this tradition, critical thinking is not a neutral cognitive skill but a process of developing awareness of social conditions and responding to injustice. Freire's concept of conscientization therefore situates criticality as ethical and transformative engagement rather than cognitive performance. Brookfield (2017) extends this perspective by emphasizing that critical thinking involves identifying hidden assumptions, recognizing ideological influence, and developing agency in learning. Zembylas (2013) further highlights the emotional dimensions of critical pedagogy, showing how critique can involve emotional labour in educational contexts where questioning authority is discouraged.

Within this framework, the educator shifts from knowledge transmitter to facilitator of reflective and dialogic learning. Teaching therefore involves creating spaces in which students interrogate assumptions, connect knowledge to social realities, and develop ethical judgment. Such an approach is particularly relevant in contexts where institutional norms may discourage open critique or debate. For Nigerian business educators, critical pedagogy offers a framework for cultivating reflective engagement while also revealing the structural and cultural constraints that shape how criticality can be enacted in practice.

CME and professional ethics

In business education, critical pedagogy is further developed through CME, which challenges managerialist assumptions and the reproduction of uncritical market-oriented knowledge. Dehler et al. (2001) argue that conventional business curricula often marginalize issues of power, ethics, and inequality in favour of instrumental managerial competence. CME instead seeks to cultivate critical reflection, moral reasoning, and transformative learning within management education. Cunliffe (2016) advances this perspective through the concept of reflexive dialogue, encouraging educators to engage students in examining the assumptions that shape ideas of leadership, professionalism, and organizational practice. Similarly, Alvesson and Spicer (2012) emphasize the importance of responsible management education that prioritizes ethical responsibility and social impact over narrow efficiency-driven models of managerial performance.

Within this perspective, criticality is understood not simply as a cognitive skill but as an ethical and reflexive orientation to professional practice. Teaching therefore involves encouraging students to question dominant managerial logics and to consider the broader social consequences of organizational decisions. Kahveci (2021) further shows that educators' professional identities influence how such pedagogical approaches are interpreted and enacted. Critical teaching practices therefore emerge through the interaction of educators' values, institutional expectations, and disciplinary traditions.

Postcolonial curriculum theory and knowledge hierarchies

Postcolonial scholarship has long argued that African higher education systems frequently reproduce Western epistemologies that marginalize local knowledge traditions. Nkomo (2011) describes this condition as epistemic dependency, where management theory is imported with limited adaptation to local social and economic realities. Andreotti (2011) similarly critiques curriculum reforms that, despite progressive intentions, continue to operate within deficit frameworks that position African contexts as lagging behind global—often Western—standards. Banerjee (2022) and Le Grange et al. (2020) further emphasize that meaningful curriculum transformation requires attention not only to what knowledge is taught but also to how knowledge authority is constructed within universities.

Within this perspective, teaching criticality in Nigerian business education requires engagement with the historical and institutional legacies that shape curriculum design, pedagogical relationships, and knowledge legitimacy. Epistemic pluralism—recognizing multiple ways of knowing—becomes central to challenging inherited hierarchies of knowledge and to developing contextually relevant forms of business education. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) describes this process as epistemic freedom, emphasizing the importance of integrating African intellectual traditions, social experiences, and ethical perspectives into university curricula.

Epistemic justice and educational practice

Fricker (2007) conceptualizes epistemic injustice as a wrong done to individuals in their capacity as knowers. In education, this framework examines how credibility, voice, and intelligibility are unevenly distributed across learners, educators, and knowledge traditions. Recent work in philosophy of education emphasizes that education can both reproduce

epistemic injustice and challenge it through curriculum, pedagogy, and institutional design (Omodan, 2023; Nikolaidis & Thompson, 2023).

In Nigerian universities, this perspective highlights how local knowledge, educator experience, and culturally grounded forms of judgment may be marginalized by imported curricular models and tightly regulated institutional expectations. Educators who introduce alternative perspectives or locally grounded content may therefore encounter institutional resistance. Luckett and Shay (2020) describe curriculum transformation as a process of epistemic repair requiring structural change in how authority, legitimacy, and participation are organized within educational institutions. Addressing these conditions is essential for creating educational environments in which critical reflection and plural forms of knowledge can be meaningfully engaged.

Graduate identity and critical dispositions

Criticality is closely linked to the formation of graduate identity. Hinchliffe and Jolly (2011) conceptualize employability as a process of identity development structured around four dimensions: values, intellect, social engagement, and performance. Within this framework, critical thinking is understood not simply as a technical skill but as a reflective and moral disposition that shapes how graduates interpret professional responsibility and social context. Clarke (2018) and Tomlinson (2017) extend this perspective by showing that graduate identity emerges through the interaction between institutional expectations and individual aspirations during higher education.

However, tensions often arise between the promotion of critical thinking and institutional assessment practices. Jackson (2016) observes that universities frequently emphasise measurable performance indicators that reward compliance rather than independent judgment. Walker and Boni (2013) address this limitation through a capabilities-based model of graduate development that highlights critical consciousness, solidarity, and social justice. From this perspective, criticality supports not only employability but also the development of graduates capable of ethical reasoning, civic engagement, and socially responsible professional practice.

Taken together, these perspectives conceptualize criticality as a pedagogical practice shaped by the interaction of ethical commitments, knowledge structures, and institutional conditions. In this study, critical pedagogy and critical management education provide the primary interpretive lens for examining how educators cultivate reflexive and dialogic engagement in business education, while postcolonial and epistemic justice perspectives draw attention to the power relations that shape knowledge legitimacy and participation within universities. Graduate identity research complements this framework by situating criticality within processes of professional formation rather than treating it as an isolated cognitive skill. This integrated framework enables analysis of how Nigerian business educators interpret and enact criticality within the institutional, cultural, and curricular conditions that shape pedagogical practice.

Contextual conditions in Nigeria: structural constraints and institutional logic

Existing literature identifies several systemic factors shaping the scope for teaching criticality in Nigerian universities. Content-heavy and highly structured curricula often leave limited space for dialogic or reflective learning (Edet and Udida, 2019), while institutional ownership influences curriculum design, resource allocation, and levels of pedagogical autonomy (Edet, 2020). Large class sizes, limited infrastructure, and heavy teaching workloads further constrain opportunities for pedagogical experimentation and curriculum innovation (Adeyemi, 2012; Iyioke and Iyioke, 2020). Regulatory oversight and accreditation frameworks may also reinforce standardized curricula and compliance-oriented practices, reducing flexibility for educators to adapt teaching approaches (Luckett and Shay, 2020). As Contu (2020) observes, critical teaching often unfolds within such institutional constraints, requiring educators to navigate tensions between professional values and organizational expectations. These structural conditions therefore shape both the possibilities for pedagogical experimentation and the institutional environments within which criticality is enacted and negotiated.

Methodology

Research philosophy and design

This study adopts a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, viewing reality as socially constructed and shaped by individual and contextual factors (Creswell and Poth, 2018; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). It combines phenomenology to examine educators' lived experiences (van Manen, 2016) with narrative inquiry to explore how they construct professional identities and pedagogical meaning through storytelling (Clandinin, 2006; Riessman, 2008). This design enables an in-depth exploration of the relational and situated nature of criticality in Nigerian business education.

Sampling strategy

Purposive sampling with maximum variation (Patton, 2015) was used to capture diversity across institutional types, regions, and professional profiles. Nigeria had 297 accredited universities at the time of sampling (National Universities Commission, 2025). Business Education programs were identified through publicly available institutional listings and program directories, and affiliated colleges of education were excluded because of differences in governance and curricular autonomy (Nigerian Scholars, 2025).

34 educators were invited based on institutional ownership, experience, and geographic distribution, and 28 participated, yielding an 82% response rate. The final sample included 10 participants from federal universities, 12 from state universities, and 6 from private universities, representing all 6 geopolitical zones of Nigeria. All participants had at least three years of teaching experience and held roles ranging from lecturer to

department head. Table 1 summarizes participant demographics, including institutional type, academic rank, years of experience, curriculum responsibilities, and geographic distribution. This composition provided substantial institutional and regional variation, consistent with phenomenological research priorities of depth and experiential insight (van Manen, 2016). It also aligns with narrative inquiry's emphasis on contextual variation and interpretive meaning making (Creswell and Poth, 2018; Riessman, 2008).

Data collection

Data collection took place between November 2024 and February 2025, involving semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 28 business educators across federal, state, and private universities in Nigeria. Each interview lasted between 65 and 90 min and was conducted either in person or via secure video conferencing, depending on participant location and scheduling preference. This flexible approach supported the study's phenomenological and narrative orientation, enabling participants to engage in reflective, context-rich storytelling that foregrounded lived experience (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015).

The interview protocol focused on five thematic areas: educators' academic and teaching backgrounds; definitions of criticality; strategies for integrating critical thinking into pedagogy; institutional enablers and constraints; and experiences with curriculum development. Open-ended prompts such as "How do you define criticality in your teaching?" and "Can you describe a moment when your students demonstrated critical engagement?" encouraged rich elaboration on both beliefs and practices. This format supported a dialogic interaction that invited personal reflection and pedagogical introspection.

All interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent and transcribed verbatim. Participants were provided with information sheets outlining the study's objectives, ethical safeguards, and their right to withdraw at any point. Pseudonyms were used to ensure anonymity. In addition to transcriptions, the lead researcher maintained detailed field notes during and after interviews to capture emotional cues,

TABLE 1 Overview of participant characteristics.

Participant ID	Gender	Role or Rank	Institution type	Years of experience	Curriculum role	Zone
P01	Female	Senior Lecturer	Federal	9	Yes	South-East
P02	Male	Program Coordinator	Private	6	Yes	South-West
P03	Female	Lecturer I	State	5	No	South-East
P04	Male	Associate Professor	Federal	12	Yes	North-West
P05	Female	Course Leader	State	7	Yes	South-West
P06	Male	Senior Lecturer	State	8	Yes	North-Central
P07	Female	Head of Department	Federal	15	Yes	North-East
P08	Male	Lecturer I	State	6	No	North-Central
P09	Female	Program Coordinator	Private	10	Yes	South-East
P10	Male	Senior Lecturer	Federal	11	Yes	South-South
P11	Female	Associate Professor	State	13	Yes	South-South
P12	Male	Course Coordinator	Private	7	Yes	South-West
P13	Female	Lecturer II	Federal	4	No	South-East
P14	Male	Senior Lecturer	State	10	Yes	North-Central
P15	Female	Program Coordinator	Private	9	Yes	South-South
P16	Male	Lecturer I	State	6	No	North-East
P17	Female	Senior Lecturer	Federal	11	Yes	South-West
P18	Male	Course Leader	Private	8	Yes	South-South
P19	Female	Program Coordinator	Private	10	Yes	South-East
P20	Male	Lecturer II	Federal	4	No	North-West
P21	Female	Senior Lecturer	State	12	Yes	South-East
P22	Male	Head of Department	Federal	14	Yes	North-Central
P23	Female	Associate Professor	State	13	Yes	South-South
P24	Male	Lecturer I	State	6	No	South-East
P25	Female	Program Coordinator	State	9	Yes	South-West
P26	Male	Senior Lecturer	Federal	10	Yes	South-South
P27	Female	Course Leader	State	7	Yes	South-South
P28	Male	Lecturer II	State	5	No	South-East

non-verbal signals, and environmental context. These observations contributed to data triangulation and interpretive nuance. All data were stored in encrypted files on secure institutional servers, and the study adhered to the ethical protocols approved by the researcher's institution, in accordance with the British Educational Research Association's (2018) guidelines.

Researcher positionality and reflexivity

Reflexivity was integral to the study, consistent with its interpretivist and phenomenological foundations (Creswell and Poth, 2018; van Manen, 2016). Members of the research team had different relationships to the research setting. Some authors had professional experience within Nigerian higher education and familiarity with institutional structures and teaching practices, while others were not directly embedded in this context and therefore provided greater analytical distance from the research setting. This combination required attention to potential bias arising from prior assumptions and professional proximity (Kahveci, 2021; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). To address this, reflexive documentation was maintained throughout the study to record interpretations and methodological decisions, helping identify assumptions and question early interpretations of the data (Ortlipp, 2008). Data interpretation was conducted by the authors responsible for data analysis and methodology and subsequently reviewed across the research team, particularly regarding institutional power, pedagogical meaning, and alternative readings of participants' accounts. This combination of contextual familiarity and analytical distance (Braun and Clarke, 2021) strengthened rigor and aligned with postcolonial principles of ethical accountability and epistemic transparency (Banerjee, 2022; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018), supporting accurate representation of participants' accounts while examining the structural conditions shaping them.

Data analysis

The study employed a dual-method approach integrating reflexive thematic analysis and narrative inquiry to examine both the substance and structure of educators' accounts. Phenomenological principles guided the focus on lived experience and situated meaning making (Riessman, 2008; van Manen, 2016). Narrative inquiry informed the analysis of educators' accounts and the temporal construction of meaning (Clandinin, 2006). This approach aligns with the study's interpretivist constructivist foundations (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Transcripts were read multiple times to identify emotionally salient statements, interpretive tensions, and moments of pedagogical significance. Initial coding was conducted inductively, capturing both descriptive content and latent meaning. For example, statements such as "Everyone just teaches it the way they understand it" and "Teaching critically is who I am" were coded for conceptual ambiguity and ethical commitment. These early codes were iteratively reviewed and refined into higher order themes, drawing on both semantic recurrence and theoretical resonance. Reflexive journaling and peer debriefing were employed throughout the analytic process to strengthen interpretive rigor (Cunliffe, 2016; Ortlipp, 2008).

The analysis produced four intersecting thematic domains that align with the study's findings. First, *varied understandings of criticality* captured the range of conceptualizations offered by participants, from analytical reasoning to moral reflection and contextual judgment. Second, *pedagogical improvisation under constraint* illustrated how educators adapted teaching practices within rigid curricula and performance-oriented institutional systems. Third, *criticality as educator identity* highlighted how educators' personal values and professional experiences shaped their engagement with critical pedagogy. Finally, *institutional and regional influences* revealed how socio-cultural norms, governance structures, and institutional expectations shaped both opportunities for and resistance to critical teaching practices.

Institutional conditions were evident across all four themes and shaped how educators interpreted and enacted criticality. Rather than emerging as a separate theme, these structural factors formed the context within which participants negotiated pedagogical strategies, professional identity, and institutional expectations.

In parallel with thematic development, narrative inquiry traced how participants constructed meaning over time, often through pivotal experiences such as shifts in pedagogical stance, responses to student resistance, and moments of institutional tension. These accounts revealed critical pedagogy as an evolving practice shaped by educators' personal histories, professional commitments, and institutional environments within postcolonial higher education systems (Riessman, 2008).

NVivo 14 supported data organization and retrieval, although all coding and interpretation were conducted manually to maintain close engagement with participants' narratives. Analysis also attended to dissonant perspectives, tone shifts, and culturally specific expressions of pedagogical agency, enabling careful examination of how educators positioned themselves within systems of constraint, authority, and aspiration.

The analytic process followed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) trustworthiness criteria. Credibility was strengthened through peer debriefing and triangulation across narrative accounts. Transferability was supported through maximum variation sampling and thick contextual description. Dependability was ensured through an audit trail documenting analytic decisions. Confirmability was reinforced through sustained reflexive journaling and collaborative interpretation. This process generated four main themes summarized in Table 2, which presents each theme alongside illustrative participant narratives and interpretive insights. Figure 1 visualizes the relationships among these themes, illustrating how personal commitment, institutional structures, and broader socio-educational conditions interact to shape the enactment of criticality in Nigerian business education.

Findings

This study examined how Nigerian business educators interpret and enact criticality within varied institutional and curricular contexts. Analysis of 28 interviews identified four themes: (1) varied understandings of criticality, (2) pedagogical

TABLE 2 Data structure – themes, participant narratives, and interpretive insights.

Theme	Illustrative quotes	Interpretive insight
Varied understandings of criticality	"Initially, I understood criticality as the ability to question authority or existing models. But over time I began to see it more as a mindset, being open to other perspectives, making ethical judgments, and being reflective." "Everyone just teaches it the way they understand it. We need more guidance because right now we are just guessing. There is no common language."	Participants' understandings of criticality evolved over time. Criticality was experienced not as a fixed academic skill but as a reflective disposition shaped by personal teaching experience and professional learning.
Pedagogical improvisation under constraint	"The curriculum is too rigid. But I try to work around it. I ask students to analyze failed campaigns in Nigeria. Within the lecture I insert space for them to question. Sometimes I use WhatsApp for further discussions." "Reflective essays are not measurable enough, so we avoid them. I embed reflection in discussions and hope students absorb it."	Educators engaged in subtle pedagogical improvisation to sustain critical engagement. Criticality was often enacted informally outside formal assessment structures, demonstrating professional agency under institutional constraint.
Criticality as educator identity	"Teaching critically is who I am. I feel responsible for helping students think beyond profits." "It is not just about curriculum. It is about who you are as a teacher."	Criticality emerged as an ethical commitment tied to professional identity. Participants framed critical teaching as an expression of values and social responsibility rather than a purely instructional technique.
Institutional and regional influences	"In private schools we are freer to try things. I redesigned assessments to include reflective journals and debates." "In the North critique is seen as disrespect. I adapt by using fictional case studies."	Institutional governance structures and regional cultural norms shaped educators' capacity to enact critical pedagogy. Teaching strategies were adapted to institutional expectations and sociocultural sensitivities.

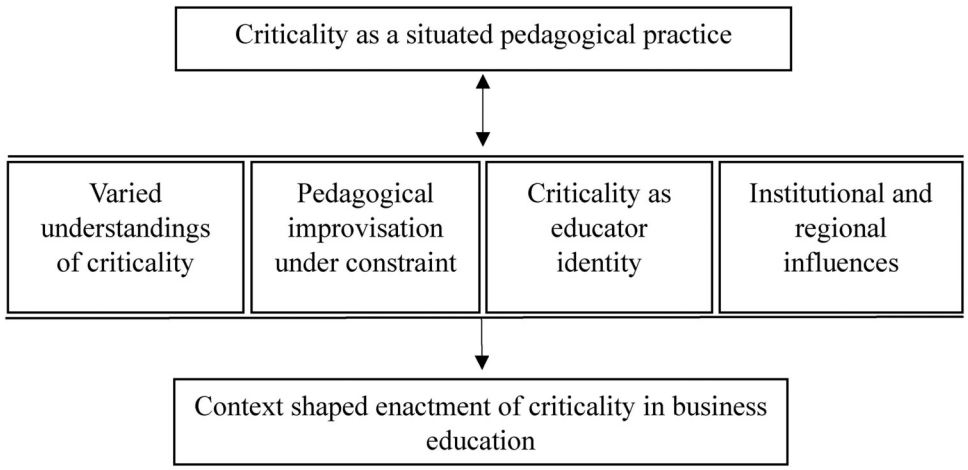

FIGURE 1
A situated model of criticality in Nigerian business education.

improvisation under constraint, (3) criticality as educator identity, and (4) institutional and regional influences. Two cross-cutting threads—educators' ethical commitments and their role in shaping graduate identity—ran across all themes.

Varied understandings of criticality

Participants described a range of meanings attached to criticality, often drawing on their academic upbringing, teaching experience, and disciplinary norms. While some associated it with argument and evidence-based reasoning, others emphasized reflection, moral judgment, and real-world relevance. This divergence reflected wider uncertainty about what criticality entails in a business education context rather than deliberate inconsistency. P01, a federal university lecturer with nearly a decade of experience, described how her interpretation had changed over time:

> "Initially, I understood criticality as the ability to question authority or existing models. But over time, especially through my teaching, I began to see it more as a mindset—being open to other perspectives, making ethical judgments, and being reflective. It's no longer just about "challenging"; it's about thinking through the implications of ideas and actions. That

> shift happened gradually, influenced by the way students responded and also by reading more on curriculum theory."

This transition was not uncommon. Participants noted that there was no shared language or national framework for criticality in Nigerian business schools, which led to divergent practices. P06 explained:

> "Everyone just teaches it the way they understand it. For some, it means argumentation. For others, it's more about creativity or even ethics. I used to think it was just questioning, but now I see it more as a habit of mind. We need more guidance because right now, we're just guessing; there's no common language, and that affects how we assess and even teach it."

The consequences of this ambiguity appeared in classrooms where students were often unsure what was expected of them. As P14 observed:

> "I mix it up with creativity and problem-solving—it's not always clear where one ends and the other begins. Sometimes I'll tell students to question, but they're used to memorizing. So, I try to demonstrate it with examples from real life, like when a business model fails. But even then, I wonder, is this what critical thinking really is? There's no national standard or training on it."

This lack of clarity resonates with earlier research on business education, where critical thinking is often invoked but rarely defined consistently (Davies, 2015). In Nigeria, this inconsistency is exacerbated by rigid curricula and uneven pedagogical development opportunities. While a few participants viewed this flexibility as empowering, most felt it undermined shared goals and led to assessment challenges.

Pedagogical improvisation under constraint

In the face of prescriptive syllabi and performance-based institutional demands, many participants described the need to work around formal requirements to foster criticality. These adjustments were often small—adding questions during lectures, extending debates online, or designing informal reflection activities. Rather than directly confronting institutional norms, they reflected an ongoing effort to negotiate constraints while sustaining personal teaching values. P09 shared how she worked around rigid course outlines:

> "The curriculum is too rigid—there's a fixed outline and fixed texts. But I try to work around it. For instance, when discussing marketing, I ask students to analyze failed campaigns in Nigeria, not just the textbook cases. It's subtle, because officially I have to follow the syllabus. But within the lecture, I insert space for them to question. Sometimes I use WhatsApp for further discussions, that's where the real thinking happens."

Assessment systems posed an additional layer of difficulty. Reflective and open-ended work was often seen as less rigorous or too subjective. P13 recounted an unsuccessful attempt to embed practices associated with criticality into assessment:

> "Reflective essays are not measurable enough, so we avoid them. It's easier to give multiple-choice or short-answer questions. But those don't capture real thinking. I once tried to include a reflection component in a course, but the external examiner said it wasn't rigorous. So now, I embed reflection in discussions and hope students absorb it. There's no institutional reward for teaching critically."

Some participants found creative ways to work within these constraints. P21 described how she used current events and informal discussions to challenge students:

> "We introduce critical thinking but unofficially. It's not in the course outline, but during classes, I raise questions that push them to link theory with what they see in the news or on campus. One time we discussed corruption in procurement not from the textbook, but from real-life stories. I asked, "What would you do differently?" That got them thinking. But none of that is in the official record."

These accounts echo Freire's (2020) idea of teachers as cultural workers who subtly push boundaries rather than waiting for structural change. Even in tightly regulated settings, educators exercised professional judgment to keep criticality alive in practice, if not in documentation.

Criticality as educator identity

Many participants described teaching critically not as a technique or method but as an extension of who they are. For them, criticality was linked to a deep belief in education as a tool for personal and social development. This sense of purpose often outweighed the lack of institutional encouragement or material recognition. P03, who teaches at a state university, articulated this as a moral responsibility:

> "I believe students should challenge ideas for the good of society. Teaching critically is who I am. Even if the system doesn't reward it, I feel responsible for helping them think beyond profits. Business education should shape citizens, not just workers. When I bring real issues into class—like inequality or corruption—I'm not just teaching content, I'm passing on values. That's what keeps me going."

Similarly, P16 connected her approach to her international academic training and personal experiences:

> "It's not just about curriculum. It's about who you are as a teacher. I was trained in a different system, so I bring that perspective. I ask students to connect theory to their lived experience—to question why things are the way they are.

> Some colleagues say it's too political, but I think it's necessary. Business doesn't happen in a vacuum."

This commitment often came with personal cost. Several lecturers described an internal conflict between their teaching ideals and institutional expectations. P17 explained:

> "There's a constant tension between my belief in deep learning and what the institution expects. They want results—grades, pass rates, evaluations. But I want my students to think, to question. I've had pushbacks before, with people saying I'm complicating things. But I've made peace with it. I teach critically because that's who I am."

Cunliffe (2016) describes this kind of teaching as an ethical stance, where educators bring their values into the classroom even in the face of pressure to conform. In this study, identity and pedagogy were closely linked, with critical teaching positioned as an act of personal and professional alignment.

Institutional and regional influences

Institutional type and regional culture played an important role in shaping both what was possible and what was accepted in the enactment of criticality. Participants from private universities reported greater flexibility, while those in federal institutions faced tighter bureaucratic control. Cultural norms—especially around respect, authority, and religion—also influenced how students responded to critical pedagogical approaches. P12, who works at a private university, shared how institutional support affected her teaching:

> "In private schools we're freer to try things. I've redesigned assessments to include reflective journals and debates. There's more room to experiment because management is open to innovation. In public schools, colleagues say they must stick to the outline exactly. I wouldn't be able to teach the way I do in a federal university."

However, even in relatively supportive environments, inconsistencies between rhetoric and practice were common. P08 explained:

> "Leadership says innovate but insists we stick to the outline. It's confusing. On paper, we're encouraged to promote critical thinking. But in practice, any deviation from the syllabus is seen as non-compliance. I once tried a project-based assessment and was told to change it back to standard format. So now I just teach both—the official and the unofficial."

Regional values shaped not only teaching strategies but also student engagement. P20, who teaches in Northern Nigeria, described the difficulty of promoting open debate:

> "In the North, critique is seen as disrespect. Students are very polite—they rarely question what I say. I try to encourage discussion, but it's not easy. I've had to adapt by using case studies where they critique fictional scenarios instead of each other. That way, I still teach critical thinking, but in a way that fits the culture."

These findings reflect calls for culturally responsive teaching in postcolonial contexts (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). They show that critical pedagogy cannot be transplanted wholesale from one setting to another but must be adapted to fit institutional goals, student expectations, and regional norms.

Discussion

The findings indicate that criticality in Nigerian business education is enacted through ongoing negotiation between educators' professional identities, institutional structures, and socio-cultural expectations. The four themes identified in the findings—varied understandings of criticality, pedagogical improvisation under constraint, criticality as educator identity, and institutional and regional influences—reveal how critical teaching emerges through interaction between individual commitment and structural limitation. To interpret these dynamics, the discussion organizes the findings into five analytical dimensions that connect the empirical results to the study's theoretical framework: criticality as pedagogical practice, curriculum constraints and pedagogical improvisation, institutional culture and teaching conditions, ethical commitment and graduate identity, and regional variation and socio-cultural norms.

Criticality as pedagogical practice

Participants described criticality in multiple ways, including analytical reasoning, ethical judgment, and practical engagement with real-world issues. These interpretations align with Brookfield's (2017) understanding of critical reflection as an engaged learning process and Cunliffe's (2016) emphasis on relational dialogue in management education. Recent research also shows that reflective engagement develops through structured pedagogical interaction and guided discussion rather than through isolated cognitive instruction (Chao and Wright, 2025; Zhang et al., 2025).

Educators in this study often translated criticality into classroom practice through professional judgment and contextual interpretation. Kahveci (2021) similarly demonstrates that educators' professional identities shape how critical pedagogies are interpreted and enacted. In the absence of shared national frameworks or institutional guidance, participants frequently developed their own interpretations of criticality. This variation suggests that criticality functions less as a standardized instructional technique and more as a pedagogical orientation shaped by educators' experiences and institutional environments

Luckett and Shay (2020) note that when shared conceptual reference points are absent, educational practices can become uneven across institutions. While interpretive flexibility may support pedagogical creativity, excessive ambiguity can also

produce inconsistent learning experiences and place disproportionate responsibility on individual educators to define educational objectives.

Curriculum constraints and pedagogical improvisation

Curriculum structures in Nigerian business education—particularly in public universities—remain highly prescriptive, emphasizing fixed content coverage and measurable outputs. Shay (2015) characterizes such models as product-oriented curricula, where learning is framed as the acquisition of standardized inputs rather than a process of inquiry. Edet and Udida (2019) similarly observe that accreditation requirements and regulatory oversight frequently restrict curricular flexibility.

Participants therefore relied on informal pedagogical adaptations to incorporate critical engagement into teaching. Case discussions, narrative analysis, and digital dialogue platforms were commonly used to encourage reflective questioning. These practices resemble what Mercier and Deslandes (2020) describe as informal benevolence, where educators adapt teaching practices to preserve ethical and developmental goals that are not formally recognized within institutional frameworks. Evidence from higher education research also suggests that dialogic and collaborative learning environments can strengthen critical engagement when students are encouraged to question, compare, and justify ideas (Loes and Pascarella, 2017).

Despite their pedagogical value, such practices often remain invisible within formal evaluation systems. As the findings indicate, educators frequently operate within dual expectations: institutional compliance with prescribed curricula and professional commitment to deeper learning. CME scholarship has long highlighted this tension, noting that rhetorical commitments to critique often coexist with structural incentives for conformity within business schools (Dehler et al., 2001; Grey, 2004).

Institutional culture and teaching conditions

Institutional environments strongly influence educators' capacity to enact critical pedagogies. Participants working in private universities often reported greater autonomy to experiment with assessment formats and classroom dialogue. In contrast, educators in federal and state institutions described larger class sizes, stricter curricular oversight, and heavier administrative expectations

Andreotti (2011) cautions that relying solely on individual educators to sustain critical pedagogical change produces fragile and unsustainable reform efforts. This concern was reflected in the findings, where critical teaching often depended more on individual commitment than on institutional strategy. Zembylas (2013) similarly highlights the emotional labor involved in critical pedagogy, particularly within institutional environments that prioritize compliance and standardization.

Professional development structures also shape these dynamics. Participants reported that institutional training frequently emphasizes administrative procedures rather than pedagogical philosophy. Edet (2020) notes that teaching quality in Nigerian higher education is often assessed through quantitative indicators rather than reflective or ethical dimensions of teaching practice. Without institutional mechanisms supporting pedagogical experimentation, educators often rely on informal peer networks and self-directed development.

Ethical commitment and graduate identity

Across the findings, criticality was consistently framed as an ethical responsibility rather than merely a pedagogical technique. Participants described teaching critically as part of their commitment to developing graduates capable of ethical judgment and social responsibility. This orientation reflects Freire's (2020) argument that education should cultivate agency, moral awareness, and critical engagement with social realities

Hinchliffe and Jolly (2011) conceptualize employability as a process of identity formation integrating values, intellect, and social engagement. Educators in the study echoed this perspective by linking criticality to the development of graduates capable of navigating complexity and acting with integrity. However, institutional evaluation systems frequently prioritize measurable outcomes such as examination results and completion rates, reinforcing Jackson's (2016) observation that the symbolic value of critical engagement in higher education is often not matched by institutional support

Maesschalck (2022) similarly argues that ethical reflection should be embedded within educational design rather than treated as an auxiliary component of professional education. Participants demonstrated this approach by integrating real-world ethical dilemmas into classroom discussions, even when such practices fell outside formal curricular requirements.

Regional variation and socio-cultural norms

Regional socio-cultural contexts also shape how critical pedagogies are enacted. Participants teaching in Northern Nigeria described greater difficulty encouraging open debate because cultural norms often associate critique with disrespect toward authority. Educators therefore adopted indirect pedagogical strategies—such as hypothetical scenarios and fictional case discussions—that enabled critical engagement while maintaining cultural respect

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) argues that educational practices must be responsive to specific postcolonial contexts rather than assuming universal pedagogical models. The findings support this argument, demonstrating that critical pedagogy requires adaptation to local socio-cultural expectations and institutional environments

Le Grange et al. (2020) similarly emphasize that meaningful curriculum transformation must recognize epistemological diversity. However, the findings also reveal potential inequalities: educators working within more culturally restrictive environments often face additional barriers when implementing

critical pedagogies. Trowler's (2008) work on institutional culture highlights how everyday routines and informal norms shape teaching practices alongside formal policy. In this study, such dynamics contribute to uneven opportunities for critical engagement across institutions and regions.

Theoretical and methodological contributions

This study offers two distinct contributions.

Theoretical contribution

This study reconceptualizes criticality in business education as a situated pedagogical practice rather than a generic graduate skill. The argument synthesizes five theoretical domains. Critical pedagogy explains dialogic learning and ethical engagement in teaching. CME emphasizes reflexivity and critique of managerial assumptions. Postcolonial curriculum theory highlights how colonial knowledge hierarchies shape legitimate knowledge in African universities. Epistemic justice addresses whose knowledge is recognized or marginalized within educational systems. Graduate identity theory situates criticality within professional identity formation and ethical judgment.

Together these perspectives explain criticality as a negotiated practice shaped by educators' values, institutional conditions, and socio-cultural context. This moves beyond universalist models of critical thinking in management education by showing how criticality is enacted through diverse pedagogical logics under structural and cultural constraints in postcolonial African settings (Brookfield, 2017; Cunliffe, 2016). It also aligns with scholarship emphasizing how colonial knowledge hierarchies and epistemic injustice shape higher education in African contexts (Andreotti, 2011; Le Grange et al., 2020; Nkomo, 2011).

Methodological contribution

This study combines phenomenology and narrative inquiry within a single interpretive design to address a methodological gap in research on criticality in higher education. Phenomenology enabled systematic analysis of shared lived experience across educators, while narrative inquiry traced how participants constructed pedagogical meaning and professional identity over time. In contrast to research that has commonly relied on surveys, curriculum review, policy analysis, or single-method qualitative designs, this integrated approach captures both recurrent experiential patterns and the temporal, identity-based dimensions of teaching under constraint. The combination makes visible forms of ethical labor, emotional resilience, and pedagogical improvisation that are difficult to detect through outcome-oriented or decontextualized approaches. Methodologically, the study therefore shows how criticality can be investigated not only as a stated educational objective but also as an evolving professional practice negotiated within institutional and socio-cultural limits.

Implications for policy and practice

Institutional and systemic reforms are essential if criticality is to move from isolated, unsanctioned practice to a sustainable pedagogical norm in Nigerian business education. Professional development must shift from compliance-oriented training to capacity-building that cultivates relational, ethical, and context-responsive pedagogy. Curriculum design should embed criticality by valuing local epistemologies, integrating interdisciplinary inquiry, and positioning ethical judgment as a formal learning outcome alongside technical competence.

Evaluation and promotion systems need to recognize pedagogical innovation, informal mentoring, and contributions to civic and moral development as legitimate performance indicators, on par with research outputs. Accreditation and regulatory bodies should allow policy flexibility, replacing rigidly standardized curricula with frameworks that permit institutional adaptation to local socio-cultural contexts. Finally, institutional cultures must replace deficit views of educator autonomy with trust-based systems that enable reflective professional judgment and reward sustained engagement with critical pedagogy. These changes require explicit policy commitment, targeted investment, and accountability structures that measure not only knowledge transmission but also the cultivation of critical, ethically aware graduates.

Implications for future research

Building on the current educator-focused analysis, future studies should examine how students identify, experience, and apply criticality, and assess its influence on employability, moral reasoning, and civic engagement. Comparative research across institutions and national systems—for example, contrasting public and private universities or Anglophone and Francophone African business schools—would test how historical, linguistic, and policy differences shape critical pedagogy.

Longitudinal studies could follow cohorts of educators or institutions over time to evaluate how criticality practices evolve in response to targeted interventions, reforms, or shifts in institutional culture. In addition, research should investigate how systemic actors such as accreditation agencies, funding bodies, and senior university leadership create conditions that either enable or suppress critical pedagogy, using methods such as policy tracing and organizational ethnography. Such work will strengthen theory by clarifying how context-specific dynamics interact with structural forces and refine practice by identifying leverage points for systemic change in postcolonial and Global South higher education.

Conclusion

This study shows that criticality in Nigerian business education is best understood as a situated pedagogical practice shaped by institutional structures, socio-cultural norms, and educators' professional identities. Across federal, state, and private universities, educators negotiated institutional expectations and personal commitments while using both formal

and informal practices to promote reflection, ethical judgment, dialogue, and independent analysis among students. Rather than functioning as a standardized graduate skill, criticality is enacted through context-specific teaching practices embedded in institutional and socio-cultural environments.

The findings therefore challenge the assumption that criticality can be universally standardized within business education. Instead, criticality develops through interaction between educators' values, institutional constraints, and socio-cultural conditions. By integrating insights from critical pedagogy, CME, postcolonial curriculum theory, epistemic justice, and graduate identity research, the study conceptualizes criticality as both a pedagogical practice and an institutional concern that evolves through professional engagement rather than formal prescription.

The study contributes to the literature by extending debates on critical pedagogy and CME to Nigerian higher education and other Global South contexts. It also highlights the importance of institutional environments that support reflective teaching, curriculum flexibility, and recognition of educators' ethical and pedagogical labor. Embedding criticality in business education therefore requires coordinated reform across curriculum design, professional development, and institutional evaluation systems so that reflective judgment, ethical awareness, and socially responsible practice become sustained features of graduate formation rather than isolated classroom initiatives.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Ethics statement

All procedures involving human participants were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional review board of Fatima College of Health Sciences, Abu Dhabi, UAE, and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

TT: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Methodology, Resources, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft. SG: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Methodology, Resources, Validation, Writing – review & editing. AT: Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Software, Writing – original draft. FA: Validation, Writing – review & editing. RL: Validation, Writing – review & editing. SA: Writing – review & editing.

Funding

The author(s) declared that financial support was not received for this work and/or its publication.

Conflict of interest

The author(s) declared that this work was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Generative AI statement

The author(s) declared that generative AI was not used in the creation of this manuscript.

Any alternative text (alt text) provided alongside figures in this article has been generated by Frontiers with the support of artificial intelligence and reasonable efforts have been made to ensure accuracy, including review by the authors wherever possible. If you identify any issues, please contact us.

Publisher's note

References

Adeyemi, S. B. (2012). Developing critical thinking skills in students: a mandate for higher education in Nigeria. *Eur. J. Educ. Res.* 1 (2), 155–161. doi: 10.12973/eu-jer.1.2.155

Ajadi, O. (2024). Potential challenges of twenty-first-century pedagogies in Nigeria. *J. Educ. Sustain. Innov.* 2 (1), 64–73. doi: 10.56916/jesi.v2i1.832

Alvesson, M., and Spicer, A. (2012). Critical leadership studies: the case for critical performativity. *Hum. Relat.* 65 (3), 367–390. doi: 10.1177/0018726711430555

Andreotti, V. (2011). *Actionable Postcolonial Theory in Education*. New York: Springer.

Aston, K. J. (2023). Why is this hard, to have critical thinking?" exploring the factors affecting critical thinking with international higher education students. *Act. Learn. High. Educ.* 25 (3), 537–550. doi: 10.1177/14697874231168341

Banerjee, S. B. (2022). Decolonizing management theory: a critical perspective. *J. Manag. Stud.* 59 (4), 1074–1087. doi: 10.1111/joms.12756

Barnett, R. (1997). *Higher Education: A Critical Business*. London: McGraw-Hill Education.

Braun, V., and Clarke, V. (2021). *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide*. London: Sage.

Bridgstock, R. (2009). The graduate attributes we've overlooked: enhancing graduate employability through career management skills. *High. Educ. Res. Dev.* 28 (1), 31–44. doi: 10.1080/07294360802444347

Brinkmann, S., and Kvale, S. (2015). *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*, 3rd Edn. California: Sage.

British Educational Research Association (2018). *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*, 4th Edn. London: BERA. Available online at: https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-2018

Brookfield, S. D. (2017). *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*, 2nd Edn. London: Jossey-Bass.

Calma, A., and Davies, M. (2021). Critical thinking in business education: current outlook and future prospects. *Stud. High. Educ.* 46 (11), 2279–2295. doi: 10.1080/03075079.2020.1716324

Chao, J., and Wright, C. (2025). Applying the curiosity confidence crank: building critical thinking in higher education through a massive open online course. *Act. Learn. High. Educ.* 26 (3), 463–481. doi: 10.1177/14697874251329335

Clandinin, D. J. (2006). *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping a Methodology*. Alberta: Sage.

Clarke, M. (2018). Rethinking graduate employability: the role of capital, individual attributes and context. *Stud. High. Educ.* 43 (11), 1923–1937. doi: 10.1080/03075079.2017.1294152

Contu, A. (2020). Answering the crisis with intellectual activism: making a difference as business school scholars. *Hum. Relat.* 73 (5), 737–757. doi: 10.1177/0018726719827366

Creswell, J. W., and Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 4th Edn. Sundsvall: Sage.

Cunliffe, A. L. (2016). On becoming a critically reflexive practitioner redux: what does it mean to be reflexive? *J. Manag. Educ.* 40 (6), 740–6. doi: 10.1177/1052562916668919

Davies, M. (2015). "A model of critical thinking in higher education," in *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research*, ed. M. B. Paulsen (Melbourne: Springer), Vol. 30, 41–92. doi: 10.1007/978-3-319-12835-1_2

Dehler, G. E., Welsh, M. A., and Lewis, M. W. (2001). Critical pedagogy in the new paradigm. *Manag. Learn.* 32 (4), 493–511. doi: 10.1177/1350507601324005

D'Northwood, G., and Rattray, J. (2025). What is this thing called critical thinking? Perspectives from business school academics. *Innov. Educ. Teach. Int.* 62 (4), 1363–1376. doi: 10.1080/14703297.2024.2422310

Edet, D. A. (2020). Curriculum content, ownership of universities, work experience and acquisition of employability skills among business education graduates of universities in cross river state, Nigeria. *Am. J. Educ. Res. Rev.* 5 (73), 1–15.

Edet, D. A., and Udida, F. U. (2019). Business education programs' curriculum contents and acquisition of employability skills among graduates of universities in cross river state, Nigeria. *Zenodo.* 5, 75–90. doi: 10.5281/zenodo.2557017

Freire, P. (2020). "Pedagogy of the oppressed," in *Toward a Sociology of Education*, eds. J. Karabel, and A. H. Halsey (London: Routledge), 374–386.

Fricker, M. (2007). *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Grey, C. (2004). Reinventing business schools: the contribution of CME. *Acad. Manag. Learn. Educ.* 3 (2), 178–186. doi: 10.5465/amle.2004.13500519

Hinchliffe, G. W., and Jolly, A. (2011). Graduate identity and employability. *Br. Educ. Res. J.* 37 (4), 563–584. doi: 10.1080/01411926.2010.482200

Ikpesu, O. C. (2017). Globalizing business education curriculum experiences in Nigeria higher education for enhanced students' employability. *Eur. J. Bus. Innov. Res.* 5 (5), 47–57.

Iyioke, I. V., and Iyioke, I. C. (2020). Work-based learning in Nigeria's higher education: what now? *Work-Based Learn. e-J. Int.* 9 (1), 61–95.

Jackson, D. (2016). Re-conceptualizing graduate employability: the importance of pre-professional identity. *High. Educ. Res. Dev.* 35 (5), 925–939. doi: 10.1080/07294360.2016.1139551

Kahveci, P. (2021). Teachers' narratives as a lens to reveal their professional identity. *Shanlax Int. J. Educ.* 10 (1), 10–25. doi: 10.34293/education.v10i1.4273

Le Grange, L., Du Preez, P., Ramrathan, L., and Blignaut, S. (2020). Decolonising the university curriculum or decolonial-washing? A multiple case study. *J. Educ.* 80, 25–48. doi: 10.17159/2520-9868/i80a02

Lincoln, Y. S., and Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Texas: Sage.

Loes, C. N., and Pascarella, E. T. (2017). Collaborative learning and critical thinking: testing the link. *J. High. Educ.* 88 (5), 726–753. doi: 10.1080/00221546.2017.1291257

Luckett, K., and Shay, S. (2020). Reframing the curriculum: a transformative approach. *Crit. Stud. Educ.* 61 (1), 50–65. doi: 10.1080/17508487.2017.1356341

Maesschalck, J. (2022). Making behavioral ethics research more useful for ethics management practice: embracing complexity using a design science approach. *J. Bus. Ethics* 181 (4), 933–944. doi: 10.1007/s10551-021-04900-6

Mercier, G., and Deslandes, G. (2020). Formal and informal benevolence in a profit-oriented context. *J. Bus. Ethics.* 165 (1), 125–143. doi: 10.1007/s10551-019-04108-9

National Universities Commission (2025). *List of Nigerian Universities*. NUC. Available online at: https://www.nuc.edu.ng/ (Accessed March 17, 2026).

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. (2018). *Epistemic Freedom in Africa: Deprovincialization and Decolonization*. London: Routledge.

Nigerian Scholars (2025). List of universities that offer business education. Available online at: https://nigerianscholars.com/school-finder/business-education/ (Accessed March 15, 2026).

Nikolaidis, A. C. (2023). Epistemic injustice in education: exploring structural approaches, envisioning structural remedies. *J. Philos. Educ.*, 57 (4-5), 842–861.

Nkomo, S. M. (2011). A postcolonial and anti-colonial Reading of African leadership and management in organization studies. *Organization* 18 (3), 365–386. doi: 10.1177/1350508411398731

Okolie, U. C., Igwe, P. A., Mong, I. K., Nwosu, H. E., Kanu, C., and Ojemuyide, C. C. (2022). Enhancing students' critical thinking skills through engagement with innovative pedagogical practices in global south. *High. Educ. Res. Dev.* 41 (4), 1184–1198. doi: 10.1080/07294360.2021.1896482

Omodan, B. I. (2023). Unveiling epistemic injustice in education: a critical analysis of alternative approaches. *Soc. Sci. Humanit. Open.* . 8(1), 100699.

Ortlipp, M. (2008). Keeping and using reflective journals in the qualitative research process. *Qual. Rep.* 13 (4), 695–705. doi: 10.46743/2160-3715/2008.1579

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods: Integrating Theory and Practice*, 4th Edn. Dublin: Sage.

Pettersson, H. (2023). From critical thinking to criticality and back again. *J. Philos. Educ.* 57 (2), 478–494. doi: 10.1093/jopedu/qhad021

Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*. Boston: Sage.

Shay, S. (2015). Curriculum reform in higher education: a contested space. *Teach. High. Educ.* 20 (4), 431–441. doi: 10.1080/13562517.2015.1023287

Tomlinson, M. (2017). Forms of graduate capital and their relationship to graduate employability. *Educ. Train.* 59 (4), 338–352. doi: 10.1108/ET-05-2016-0090

Trowler, P. (2008). *Cultures and Change in Higher Education: Theories and Practices*. Dublin: Bloomsbury.

van Manen, M. (2016). *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action-sensitive pedagogy*, 2nd Edn. New York: Routledge.

Walker, M., and Boni, A. (2013). "Higher education and human development: towards the public and social good," in *Human Development and Capabilities*, eds. M. Walker, and A. Boni (London: Routledge), 15–29.

Yorke, M. (2006). *Embedding Employability into the Curriculum*. London: Higher Education Academy.

Zembylas, M. (2013). Critical pedagogy and emotion: working through "troubled knowledge" in posttraumatic contexts. *Crit. Stud. Educ.* 54 (2), 176–189. doi: 10.1080/17508487.2012.743468

Zembylas, M. (2024). Revisiting the notion of critical thinking in higher education: theorizing the thinking–feeling entanglement using affect theory. *Teach. High. Educ.* 29 (6), 1606–1620. doi: 10.1080/13562517.2022.2078961

Zhang, E., Zhang, Z., Liu, H., Han, S., and Xue, Z. (2025). Exploring peer facilitation and critical thinking in asynchronous online discussions: a lag sequential analysis approach. *Br. J. Educ. Technol.* 56, 2453–2477. doi: 10.1111/bjet.13583