

# Critical Literacy in University Foreign Language Teaching

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**Abstract:** *In the era of 'post-truth' and accelerated information flows with increasingly populist sources of various content, like social networks, critical literacy skills are coming more into focus in education, as every individual needs to be able to discern relevant from irrelevant information and to develop an informed and independent viewpoint on a given topic. The paper deals with the development and assessment of critical literacy skills of teacher education students in Croatia based on the discussion and written analysis of online opinion-based texts. The pre-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design was used to assess student critical literacy skills. Results indicate significant improvement in the tested skills when comparing the pre-test and the post-test results. The findings are seen as an incentive for further research and development of education materials related to critical literacy.*

**Index Terms:** *Critical Literacy, Critical Thinking, Teacher Education, Foreign Language Teaching*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Critical thinking is one of the most important skills students need to obtain in order to cope with and succeed in the information-driven age described as a 'text-saturated' 'post-truth' era (see ILTLP 2007:10 and Oxford Dictionaries online). When considering the ways in which information and knowledge are obtained in today's society, a concern is raised due to the acceleration of information flows, which has led to a more superficial acquisition of knowledge, the sources of which are predominantly populist in nature. Today's students are described as digital natives, who are more likely than previous generations to consume new information on social media. Knowledge has become populist and knowledge seekers are inundated with content which can paralyze their attempts at staying well-informed and discriminating between truthful and false information. One mechanism of coping with such a multitude of information is forming one's opinion on the basis of emotion and personal belief rather than facts. This is actually how Oxford Dictionaries define the 'post-truth' age, namely as one in which "objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief". In the 'text-saturated' 'post-truth' era information seekers are continuously bombarded with texts of all types, which persuade, position and offer ideologies in ways not always made obvious or visible (ILTLP 2007:10). The power and destructive influence of popular media texts and popular discourses is well documented, some easy examples being the discourses on 'femininity', gender roles, religion etc., which show that text has a power and capacity to influence and construct 'reality' (ibid.). Young people learn

what to think and how to behave from media sources by accepting the information offered to them as matter of fact and are shown what is valued or held as a norm in their society through legitimized representations of behavior in the media (Jackson 2010:4).

Educators and literacy teachers face a responsibility of helping young citizens develop their critical literacy skills and "tools for noticing – and taking a more informed position on – less obvious textual tactics which have equally significant ...influence." (ILTLP 2007:10). Learners find it hard to distinguish between false knowledge in the form of downloaded information and actual knowledge, which involves one's active reflection on information sources and involvement in the production of new knowledge. University students are especially expected to be able to question received information and their own experiences in order to challenge inequality and be active and independent thinking citizens (cf. Shor 1999:7). However, there is an obvious disharmony between expectations and reality, as researchers in the field of critical literacy agree that a large number of university students, both undergraduate and graduate, and even postgraduate students are not able to respond critically to the information provided through academic or media texts and are not independent in developing their own viewpoints on given subjects (Ambigapathy P. 2007; Koo et al. 2012; Kaur/Kaur Sidhu 2014).

In its analytical reading aspect, critical literacy plays an important part in the social construction of peer groups, culture, family, school setting, neighbours and other groups (Lesley 2004). In addition, the skill of critical reading and writing is an integral part of all the soft skills on the 21st century job market, which emphasizes communication, collaboration, problem-solving, democratic citizenship and digital literacy (European Commission 2006).

The survey presented here was conducted in response to an increasing need to improve students' critical literacy skills pertaining to academic and media sources of information and to examine how these skills can be advanced in a semester-long literacy course. Results suggest that the use of critical literacy strategies can contribute to a significant advancement of students' skills, increase their independent thinking and strengthen their confidence in voicing informed opinions. The introductory part of this paper is followed by five sections. Firstly, the concept of critical literacy is defined, whereupon previous research in the field is presented and research methodology of the pre-experimental survey is explained. The presentation of results is accompanied by a discussion and conclusions with suggestions for further research in the field of critical literacy.

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## II. DEFINING CRITICAL LITERACY

The concept of critical literacy is not new in education and is known under different names like critical language awareness, critical social literacy, and critically-aware literacy. Despite these variations, there are common assumptions and goals in all critical literacy models: Firstly, the concept is based on the idea that language education has the ability to influence and change the way we think and perceive the world around us (Wray 2013: 3). Secondly, language and other communication systems are seen as inseparable from culture and society, implying that language use is never „neutral or value-free“ (ibid.). Thirdly, analysis and evaluation are viewed as the central activities of critical literacy, and lastly, social activism and awareness of social injustice inform most critical literacy concepts (ibid.). All the common aspects are present in the idea of critical literacy from its beginnings, which are rooted in the Deweyan constructivist idea of education. As such, education is aimed at the realization of democratic ideals and the construction of reflective democratic citizens through liberal arts and practical experience (Dewey 1916).

More recent concepts of critical literacy are focused on two main aspects, one being the social component (language as social practice), the other multimodality in communication (multiliteracies). In view of the former, meaning is made within a specific social context and social interaction. Emphasizing this aspect, Shor (1999:1) views critical literacy as „language use that questions the social construction of the self“ and requires the questioning of received information and own experiences in order to challenge inequality and develop „an activist citizenry“ (ibid. 7). Its task is to show us how language shapes us and how we can remake ourselves through oppositional discourses (ibid.1). In this sense, critical literacy is seen as both “reflective and reflexive: Language use and education are social practices used to critically study all social practices including the social practices of language use and education.” (ibid.1). Brooke (1987:141) drives Shor's ideas further when equating writing to divergent thinking and an act of resistance. For him writing „involves standing outside the roles and beliefs offered by a social situation – ... questioning them, searching for new connections, building ideas that may be in conflict with accepted ways of thinking and acting.“ (ibid.).

When focusing on the multimodal aspects of communication, critical literacy is conceptualized as ‘multiliteracies’. The idea behind this concept is that ‘literacy’ alone is a narrow model which does not acknowledge the contemporary needs of individuals inhabiting a multimodal world. In this sense, literacy professionals speak of a “multiply-mediated and multiply ‘modalities’ world” in which a “wide range of behaviours, knowledge, actions and practices [is] required for successful navigation” (ILTLP 2007: 8). Multiplicity of literacy practices is conceptualised in the widely used Four Resources Model of Literacy Practices by Luke and Freebody (1997). The model represents the resources needed to be drawn upon in order for individuals to become effective text producers, consumers and analysts, citing the four main roles an individual should enact: code breaker, meaning maker, text user and text analyst

(ILTLP 2007:9-10). Together these roles provide the capability “of responding to the power and complexity of changing social, textual and cultural conditions” (ibid.,10)

From the above said, it is evident that an active participant in today's society requires critical literacy as a core skill without which he or she is unable to act as an independently thinking individual. In Croatia this was acknowledged by promoting the idea of 21st century literacy, which includes, apart from traditional literacy, the ability to read with understanding, communicate, speak foreign languages and use contemporary information and communication technologies (MZOS 2004:13). The aim of literacy understood in this way is the ability to understand the occurrences and events related to natural processes and society, problem solving, team work, acceptance of differences and others and the ability of lifelong learning (ibid, 13). This understanding of literacy is much more in line with the current education needs and its theoretical conceptualization presents a first step towards developing the said skills among the next generations of students.

## III. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Empirical studies assessing students' critical literacy suggest that learners lack independent thinking skills. Fong et al. (2014) studied postgraduate tertiary students' 21st century skills, which included the skills of critical and creative thinking. They found that respondents possessed average critical and creative thinking skills with low success in the willingness to take intellectual risks (ibid.135). Lecturers teaching critical literacy pointed out many deficiencies in their students'critical reading and writing (ibid.).

Kaur and Kaur Sidhu (2014) suggest that poor critical literacy skills among Malaysian students are caused by a teacher-centered environment and exam-oriented education. Researchers recognize the need of providing learners with contexts with which they can connect their experiences in critical literacy lessons (ibid.). In their analysis of the benefits of applying CLA (Critical Literacy Awareness) strategies in a course on language and literacy Koo et al. (2012) concluded that the use of such strategies increases student engagement and strengthens students' voices.

Albeckay (2014) investigated the effect of students' participation in a Critical Reading Program on the improvement of their critical reading skills. His experimental research showed that the majority of the students participating in the program improved their reading sub-skills and that further research was needed to investigate students' listening and writing skills (ibid. 180-181). In addition to the skills assessed in previous research, an older study by Fox (1993:43-44) emphasizes the importance of questioning legitimized cultural and political views and examining commonplace justifications of social injustice regarding poverty, racism, homophobia etc. According to him, critical literacy should also analyze conflicts, critically examine institutional inequities, demonstrate,, successful practices of resistance, that seeks historical evidence for possibilities and promise “and should seek,, to reduce the deafening violence of inequality“.

#### IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was designed as pre-experimental one-group pretest-posttest involving 26 students: 14 students enrolled in the third year of the integrated five-year university study program in Primary Teaching with German Language in the academic session 2015/2016 and 12 students from the academic session 2016/2017 at the Faculty of Teacher Education (University of Zagreb). There were 23 female and 3 male students in the sample. All the students in the sample were Croatian native speakers fluent in German language (B2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). As all the students were enrolled in the German language teaching program, the lessons were delivered and discussions led in German. Students were exposed to critical literacy lessons and discussions in the scope of 2 classes per week during the 15-week-long spring term. Skills were assessed on the basis of German language texts. While the lessons were delivered in German, students were encouraged to use their first language (Croatian) in the testing phase if they so preferred, in order to avoid the interference of language skills in the assessment of students' skills pertaining to expressing their opinion. This approach enabled a more accurate assessment and better insights into student thinking processes.

The texts used in the assessment were two opinion-based news articles from the online version of the German weekly magazine *Die Zeit*. A text on minority quotas in art, „Die Kunst braucht eine Quote“ („Art Needs a Quota“) by Marie Schmidt (*Zeit Online*, 2016) was delivered at pre-test, and a text on the role of women in the Catholic church, „Wir sind mehr als Deko“ („We Are More Than Decoration“) by Christina Rietz (*Zeit Online*, 2016) was used in the post-test phase.

Pre-test and post-test were conducted with the application of the rubric tool (Sandretto with Klenner, 2011) in two focus group 45-minute-sessions for each testing phase. Pre-test was conducted at the beginning of the spring term (March) and post-test at its end (June). At the beginning of each test session students were given copies of the news texts, which they were instructed to read individually in 15-20 minutes. In the second step unfamiliar words were explained, after which the students were asked to fill out a worksheet containing questions related to the five criteria from the rubric tool: *links* (LNK), *viewpoints* (VWP), *inclusion/exclusion* (IN/EX), *representation* (REP) and *influence* (INFL) (cf. Sandretto with Klenner 2011:139). *Links* refer to the ability of recognizing connections between text and personal experience or knowledge; *viewpoints* are related to making sense of information by reflecting on multiple points of view presented or missing from the text; the *inclusion/exclusion* criterion involves the ability of identifying inclusion or exclusion occurrences of social groups or individuals, the ways in which this is made possible and the potential implications; *representation* relates to the ability of recognizing the choices of message producers in the representation of topics or people, and *influence* relates to expressing awareness of how texts influence one's thoughts and actions (ibid.). Performance level in the rubric tool was assessed on a 4-point scale: 1- *with support*, 2- *identifies*, 3-*justifies* and 4- *independent* (ibid.). The lowest value was assigned if a student was not able to independently recognize the links, viewpoints, inclusion or exclusion occurrences,

choices of topic or representation and the ways in which the text influences their own awareness, without prompts and assistance from the teacher. The *identifies*-section referred to a student's ability to only list or name the occurrences in question, without being able to provide explanations and without active participation in further discussion. The *justifies*-section referred to situations in which a student was able to provide explanations when prompted. Students assessed as *independent* were completely able to independently provide information in the discussion and participate without prompts from the teacher.

Following the worksheet assignment a discussion was led on the aspects of the topic in the text and students' responses were assessed on the basis of the rubric criteria. The final assignment was in the form of a written essay in which the main ideas of the given text were reproduced and commented on. The essays were written in students' first language, Croatian, in order to assure that the critical writing skills were ascertained without the interference of limited language proficiency. The aim of this research was not to assess students' foreign language skills, but their critical literacy skills based on the information consumed from foreign language sources and it was predicted that writing in a foreign language would limit students' expression abilities and lead to lower scores than would be the case when writing in their first language. Skills were assessed on a 5-point scale (1 – *unsatisfactory*, 5 – *excellent*) in relation to the following: *understanding of the topic* (UND), *context* (CTXT), *coherence* (COH), *use of methods* (METH) and *viewpoints offered* (VWP) (cf. Hounsell 1995: 60). In order to demonstrate the *understanding* of the topic, a student needed to provide connections between the issues discussed in it and give comments from personal experience or the world around them. In terms of *context* it was expected from students to provide some background information and reasons why the topic was discussed. *Coherence* was related to the structure of the text and the connections between the main ideas. The use of *methods* entailed the ability to identify the structural elements of the main and supporting arguments. Finally, it was assessed whether students were able to provide multiple *viewpoints* and discuss the topic from different perspectives.

#### V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results of the study indicate positive outcomes in relation to student progress in critical literacy and are in line with previous research (see Albeckay 2014; Fong et al. 2014; Kaur/Kaur Sidhu 2014; Koo et al. 2012; Roncevic 2016).

In view of students' ability to provide *links* (LNK) between the text and their personal experiences only 15% of them were able to do so *independently* in the pre-test phase (Table 1). There was significant improvement in this ability, as 38% of students demonstrated independence in establishing connections between the text and their experiences at post-test (Table 2). Many students (35%) were able to *justify* the links in terms of giving explanations and debating on the topic at initial testing. In this respect an improvement of 11% was observed, as more students were able to provide explanations of their comments at post-test (46%).



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Furthermore, in the initial stage the majority of students were only able to *identify* the major ideas from the text without justifying the connections between them (46%) and 8% of them needed support in this task. At post-test there was a significant decline in the number of students in the *identifies*-section (15%), which can be explained by their improvement in the skill of establishing links between ideas. As a result, more students were assigned higher values at post-test, because they were either able to discuss the topic independently or could give justified explanations. Hence, there were fewer of them in the lower two sections (*identifies* and *support*). Finally, while two students needed *support* in establishing links between the text and personal experience at pre-test (8%), only one needed such support at post-test. It can be concluded that the skill of establishing links between the analyzed text and the readers' own experiences and knowledge was significantly improved in the semester-long literacy course.

In relation to identifying multiple *viewpoints (VWP)*, a small number of students (8%) were able to do so *independently* and discuss various perspectives on their own in the pre-test phase (Table 1). This was significantly improved during the course, as the post-test showed that 31% of students could independently discuss various points of view (Table 2). Those who were less independent in discussing, but were able to *justify* their contributions in the discussion and give explanations were assigned the next highest value. Most students at pre-test (42%) were in the *justifies*-section, and in this respect the result remained the same at post-test (42%). In addition, the same number of learners (42%) were only able to *identify* or list multiple viewpoints without justifying them at pre-test, but this percentage was significantly lower (19%) at post-test. These results signify an improvement, because a decrease in the number of students with lower scores coincides with an increase in the number of higher-scored students for this skill. Finally, only two students needed *support* in identifying multiple viewpoints at pre-test and one still needed improvement at post-test.

The aspect of *inclusion and exclusion (IN/EX)* refers to occurrences of inclusion or exclusion of social groups or individuals in the text and students' ability of recognizing them. This is a complex skill that requires students to observe the situation given in the text from multiple perspectives. Results of the post-test in comparison to the pre-test show significant improvement of this skill. Few students (15%) were able to identify and *independently* discuss the incidences of inclusion or exclusion at pre-test (Table 1). The number of those who were able to do so independently at post-test was significantly greater, with 31% of students mastering this skill (Table 2). At pre-test many students (35%) were able to *justify* their contributions in the discussion and this number remained stable, as 38% of students demonstrated this skill at post-test. Most students (42%) were initially only able to *identify* occurrences of inclusion and exclusion without explaining them, but in this section there were fewer students at post-test (19%). This proves that students' skill in discussing incidences of inclusion or exclusion of social groups or people was improved and the majority of them were able to actively participate in the discussion in the final phase.

Regarding the students who were unable to participate independently and needed some teacher input, there were 12% of such respondents at pre-test and 8% at post-test, which indicates significant improvement of this skill.

The skill of identifying and reflecting on the ways in which people and topics are *represented (REP)* is not easy for students to obtain and it takes time develop. In the beginning only two students were able to use it *independently* (8%), but this was significantly improved and there were 23% of students who were able to discuss the issue of representation independently at post-test (Tables 1 and 2). A significant number of students (31%) could give *justified* explanations of the ways in which people and topics were represented when assessed at pre-test. Interestingly, at post-test this percentage declined by 8%, which shows that many students who had initially needed teacher's prompts, became more independent at discussing the ways of representation by the end of the course. Hence, they contributed to the percentage for the *independent* portion of respondents at post-test. At the same time, the number of students who were only able to *list* some ways of representation, but could not provide explanations, did not significantly change, with 46% of them at pre-test and 50% at post-test. Lastly, a small number of students were unable to reflect on the ways in which people and topics are represented (15%), and in this section improvement could be observed as the number of those students decreased significantly at post-test (4%).

Table 1. Reading and Discussing: Pre-test

	LNK	VWP	IN/EX	REP	INFL
Indep.	15	8	12	8	8
Justif.	35	42	35	31	31
Identif.	46	42	42	46	50
Supp.	8	8	12	15	8

Table 2. Reading and Discussing: Post-test

	LNK	VWP	IN/EX	REP	INFL
Indep..	38	31	31	23	27
Justif.	46	42	38	23	46
Identif.	15	23	19	50	23
Supp.	4	4	8	4	4

The last skill observed in the reading and discussing section was students' ability to express their awareness of how a given text *influences (INFL)* their thoughts and opinions. This skill, too, is quite complex and acquired gradually, as students continuously need to be reminded to observe the presented content from various viewpoints and to consider different, possibly conflicting interests of the people or social groups included in the issue at hand. Only 2 students (8%) were able to *independently* recognize and discuss the influence the text might have on their thoughts and actions (Table 1). Improvement was evident at post-test, as 27% of students could express their opinions independently (Table 2).



Furthermore, many students were able to provide *justified* explanations during the discussion (31%) and this percentage was significantly increased at post-test (46%). Most students were only able to *list* how the text could influence their opinions and actions (50%) and this number was reduced by half at post-test (23%), signifying that many students became more skilled in expressing critical viewpoints by the final testing phase. Finally, few students needed teacher prompts and *support* to come to conclusions about how the texts could influence them as readers (8%). Improvement in this regard was also obvious, as only one student needed such support at post-test.

The findings show that the majority of students from this study are not yet independent critical thinkers and still lack the confidence in developing their independent judgment and in questioning the viewpoint of the author. Further improvement can be made in all the five assessed areas of critical literacy, especially in the skill of reflecting on different viewpoints, recognizing how different persons or groups are represented, and on the ways in which a text or media item influences, challenges and changes student thinking.

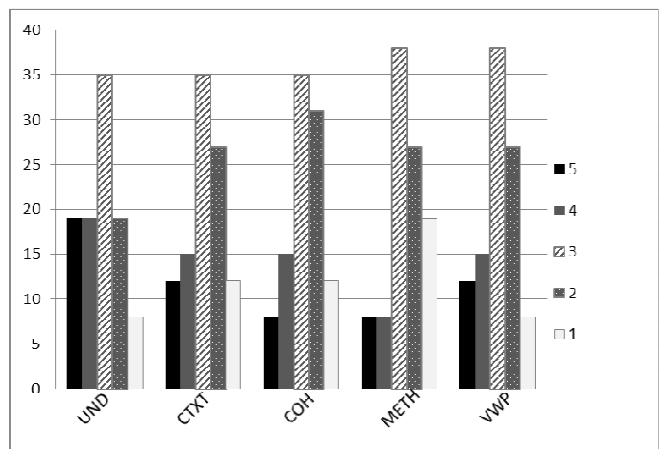
In the assessment of student **writing skills**, each demonstrated skill was graded on a scale from 1 to 5, with 5 signifying an outstanding and 1 an insufficient ability in one of the analyzed aspects: *understanding (UND)*, *context (CTXT)*, *coherence (COH)*, *methodology (METH)* and *viewpoints (VWP)*. In order to demonstrate the *understanding* of the topic, a student needed to provide connections between the issues discussed and their personal experience. When assessing *context*, it was expected that background information would be provided in the written text and that students could give reasons why the topic was discussed. For a text to be *coherent*, a student needed to structure the introduction, main arguments and the conclusion and connect the main ideas in a logical fashion. *Methods* referred to the ability of identifying the structural elements of the main and supporting arguments. *Viewpoints* pertained to students' ability of observing the topic from different perspectives and explaining these viewpoints.

In the initial testing 19% of students demonstrated an *outstanding* ability in *understanding (UND)* the topic (Graphs 1 and 2). This result was later improved by 16%, with 35% of students demonstrating outstanding understanding at post-test (Graph 2). Furthermore, 19% of students showed *very good (4)* and 35% *good (3)* understanding at pre-test. The numbers of students in these groups remained similar at post-test, with 19% of them showing *very good* and 31% *good* understanding of the topic. Furthermore, in the initial testing 19% of students achieved only *satisfactory* marks in understanding and 8% failed to understand the topic correctly (Graph 1). Post-test results indicate improvement of this skill, with 12% of students obtaining a *satisfactory* mark in understanding and only 4% of them demonstrating failure to understand the topic (Graph 2).

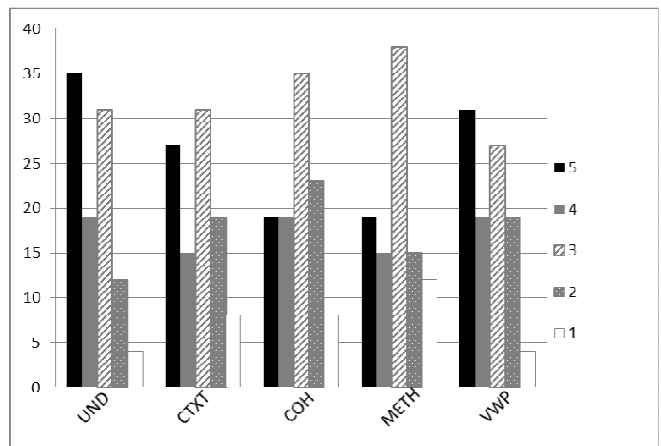
In view of students' ability to provide *context (CTXT)* in their texts, results show improvement in comparison between the initial and the final phase. Few students in the initial phase (12%) were *excellent* in this skill (Graph 1) and a significantly higher number (27%) demonstrated such abilities at post-test (Graph 2). The number of students obtaining marks 4 (*very*

*good*) and 3 (*good*) for context was stable in both testing phases. There were 15% of students at pre-test and post-test phase whose skills in providing context were assessed as *very good*. A significantly large number of students (35%) were assigned the value *good (3)* for context in the beginning and 31% of them acquired the same result at post-test. When observing the percentages for lower values, it is evident that at post-test there were fewer students who demonstrated limited context-writing skills in comparison to the number of such students at pre-test. While 27% of students were assessed as *satisfactory* in their context-writing skills at pre-test, this percentage was decreased by 8% at post-test and amounted to 19%. Furthermore, in the beginning phase there were three students whose context was written poorly and two still needed improvement at post-test.

Graph 1. Critical Literacy Skills: Writing (Pre-test)



Graph 2. Critical Literacy Skills: Writing (Post-test)



Writing *coherently (COH)* is a great challenge for most students and research results confirm this. In the initial stage most students demonstrated limited proficiency in writing coherently, with only 8% getting an *excellent* mark for coherence (Graph 1). At post-test improvement was significant, as 19% of students demonstrated an excellent skill of writing coherently (Graph 2). The number of students receiving *very good* and *good* marks remained stable at pre- and post-test:



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15% of students were assessed as *very good* at both pre- and post-test, and the percentage for *good* coherence remained at 35%. A decrease in the number of students with low grades in terms of coherence was noted, indicating improvement of this skill, which resulted in an increase in the number of students graded highly and a decrease in the number of students with lower grades for this skill. While 31% of students received *satisfactory* marks at pre-test, only 23% of them were assessed as *satisfactory* in view of coherence at post-test. Also, 12% of students failed to demonstrate coherence, and at post-test this percentage was reduced to 8%.

Another assessed skill pertained to utilizing appropriate *methods (METH)*. Identifying the structural elements of the main and supporting arguments is a demanding task for students and very few were able to do so quite well in the beginning. Only 8% of students were assessed as *excellent* in this skill at pre-test and the same percentage of students was assessed as *very good* at pre-test (Graph 1). The number of students who excelled at this skill at post-test significantly increased, with the percentage rising by 11% and amounting to 19% (Graph 2). The same was noted for students who showed *very good* utilization of appropriate methods, as 15% of them were *very good* at post-test. The number of students who were in the middle, i.e. their mark was *good*, remained constant: 38% of them demonstrated *good* utilization of appropriate methods at both pre- and post-test. Improvement was evident with the decrease in the number of students receiving lower grades in this skill: while 27% demonstrated *satisfactory* and 19% unsatisfactory performance at pre-test, only 15% were *satisfactory* and 12% *unsatisfactory* at post-test.

The final skill assessed in students' writing was the ability to identify and reflect on multiple *viewpoints (VWP)* in the written text. Improvement of this skill was identified as the number of students with higher grades increased while the number of those showing limited skill development decreased at post-test. At pre-test, 15% of students were *excellent* in providing multiple viewpoints and many more excelled at this skill at post-test (31%; Graph 1). The number of students who were *very good* remained constant, with 15% at pre-test and 19% at post-test (Graph 2). The remaining three grade groups showed a decrease in student number at post-test, corresponding to an increase in the number of better-graded students for this skill (i.e. *excellent* and *very good*). While there were 38% of students who were *good* at providing multiple viewpoints at pre-test, 27% of them were *good* at post-test. A significant decrease was also noted for the two lower-graded groups, with the number of students demonstrating *satisfactory* skill in providing multiple viewpoints dropping from 27% at pre-test to 19% at post-test. While there were two students (8%) who failed to demonstrate multiple viewpoints at pre-test, only one failed to do so at post-test.

The findings show that the majority of students from this study still need significant improvement in their writing skills and lack the confidence in developing their independent judgment and in questioning the viewpoint of the author. Further improvement can be made in all the five assessed

areas of writing, and special attention should be given to the use of methods and the practice of coherent writing, but also to the discussion on various viewpoints and perspectives on a given topic.

Limitations of this study pertain to its pre-experimental nature and limited scope, for which reason it can be used as a foundation for longitudinal and more broadly scoped studies with control groups and teams of assessors. In addition, the results of this study can be used as feedback for the critical literacy teacher and as a resource which can help the teacher set goals in a critical literacy course. For further research it would be interesting to compare the results for courses delivered in respondents' first language and in English as a second or foreign language.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The main aim of this paper was to contribute to the discussion on the role of critical literacy in education and to see how the skills in this domain of study can be developed in a critical literacy university course. One of the most important skills of students in the information-driven age is thinking and reflecting on information critically, but in the 'post-truth' era knowledge is acquired through populist sources and knowledge seekers face obstacles in discerning between information of high and low value in vast and accelerated information flows. Research results indicate that continued development of critical literacy can be of great benefit to students and that it is necessary for teachers in this field to continue improving their teaching strategies and assessment tools in accordance with the demands of multiliteracies.

The implications of this study for the readiness of students to participate in society as independent thinking citizens and as future teachers show that more can be done in the scope of their university program. It is essential for teachers to engage learners in meaningful learning experiences which will lead to their greater independence in critical thinking. Structured guidance is indispensable for the advancement of students' literacy skills and their stronger critical engagement when dealing with texts and analyzing mediated forms of information.

Literacy teachers are faced with a very challenging task of guiding students through tremendously complex processes of information analysis and are responsible for teaching them that knowing involves more than passively downloading information. In order for a learner to become an active consumer and producer of knowledge, teachers need to assign them projects where information is gathered and evaluated, and its sources are reflected on. When prevailing trends go against the use of reason and appeal to emotion and personal belief as opinion-shaping foundations, educators have a very serious task of helping students choose how to think and what to reflect on, to use evidence and challenge their own beliefs and opinions. By teaching students how to critically reflect on and question mainstream opinions, teachers will prepare them for active and meaningful participation in this society characterized by information and knowledge.



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