

Ukrainian HEI Students' Perceptions and Attitudes Towards Fostering Media Literacy and Critical Thinking in EFL Learning

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Abstract

The study examined Ukrainian HEI students' opinions and perceptions of media literacy and critical thinking skills in EFL learning before and after participation in the set of trainings. Being created in the framework of the Jean Monnet Module project "EU strategies extrapolation for boosting students' media literacy in Ukrainian higher education", it was aimed to empower students with essential skills for navigating the complexities of the modern media landscape, evaluating information sources, forming such students' competencies as critical thinking, fact-checking, digital security, resistance to media manipulation. A sample of 40 second-year undergraduate students, aged 19 to 23, willing to develop their media literacy and EFL capacities, who demonstrated at least A2 level of English language proficiency, were questioned through Google Forms by means of the specially designed questionnaires. The outcomes of the study revealed that the issues of media literacy and critical thinking were of particular importance among the young people, but they also pointed out their awareness of being insufficiently skilled in working with media products, their concerns about the quality of digital content they had consumed and priorities of being independent in media consumption choices. The activities conducted during the study significantly affected students' gaining knowledge of media development, their value-meaningful attitude to the media space, the desire to detect false information, and distinguish fakes, manipulation, propaganda, and disinformation.

Keywords: critical thinking, Google Forms, HEI students, media literacy, set of trainings

1. Introduction

In the modern digitalized world, as we are surrounded by an endless flow of information, it is crucial to be able to interpret the information we receive critically. Moreover, the requirement to implement media education in Ukraine is currently determined by the necessity to effectively counter information aggression as a component of the hybrid war that is being waged against Ukraine, as well as the country's course toward full membership in the European Union, where the development of media education is one of the main priorities of educational policy.

Nowadays, media education is regarded as a process of students' personal development through and on the material of media in order to form a culture of communication with media, creative, communicative abilities, critical thinking, skills of full perception, interpretation, analysis, and evaluation of media texts, self-expression through media (Lokshyna & Prykhodkina, 2020). Enhancement of students' media literacy involves the creation of training courses at educational institutions. That is why a training course, "Major EU practices on media literacy for boosting students' critical thinking in the frame of the target language learning," was developed and is being implemented within the realization of the Erasmus+ Jean Monnet Module project "EU strategies extrapolation for boosting students' media literacy in Ukrainian higher education" at Sumy National Agrarian University, Ukraine (SNAU). The project is aimed at popularizing the main directions of EU policy in the field of media education and involving Ukrainian higher education institutions in the European discourse on media literacy in wartime, development of media awareness among young people (in particular, students, graduate students, high school students) (Bilotserkovets, Lushchik, Fomenko, & Klochkova, 2023).

To support young people in efficient and competent functioning within the information space, a set of trainings in the

field of media literacy and critical thinking development, “Information: truth and fakes in the media space of Ukraine and the EU: relationship with EU practices,” was organized and held in the framework of the Erasmus+ project. The organizers timed the pieces of training to World Press Freedom Day since freedom of speech in the face of global crises was considered by the international democratic community to be a driver for all other human rights. Students’ participation in the set of trainings was a basis for the case study.

1.1 Aim of the Research

The case study is targeted to explore students’ attitudes and impressions from the new experience of critical perception of digital media products applied into EFL studying. The objectives of the study included conducting a review of recent scientific research to prepare the materials and tools for the case study; implementing a set of media trainings in the process of EFL extracurricular activities; and determining overall perceptions and attitudes of Ukrainian HEI students towards media literacy and critical thinking skills fostering.

1.2 Literature Review

Media literacy is an essential element of information consumption policy; it should cover all categories of people throughout their lives. According to Zhang and Wu (2023), contemporary university students belong to “digital natives” as they are surrounded and continually influenced by digital technologies. University students actively use the Internet for general and academic purposes. Concurrently, young people are quite a vulnerable group among media users. Being confident users of the internet and heavy consumers of social media, university students are not necessarily competent users; they face a multitude of research-based tasks to identify, locate, and synthesize various sources of information in order to meet their information needs (Mrah, 2022).

Previous research has shown that young people often lack basic media literacy skills, in particular, how to tell the difference between true, biased, and fake information, to evaluate the trustworthiness of the information they encounter online, and how to judge the reliability of web-based content accurately (McGrew, Smith, Breakstone, Ortega, & Wineburg, 2019; Nygren & Guath, 2019). The scholars state that teaching and learning source critical evaluation is important to support a constructive treatment of online news. So, students need to be media literate to understand and assess information from media sources and navigate the digital environment (Bilotserkovets et al., 2021).

However, the issue of students’ and educators’ attitudes toward the application of mass media in the academic process is still controversial. Either it is highly praised for students’ engagement in multimodal practice with feedback, the opportunity to express themselves and understand the world through media (Afrilyasanti, Basthomi, Zen, & Fauziah, 2023); for its usefulness, interactivity, and cost-effectiveness in the promotion of a positive attitude toward the use of English-content, its relevance and motivational aspects (Rasyid, Hanjariyah & Aini, 2023); for its familiar and enjoyable aspects of mass media materials application in teaching that enabled the creation of a dynamic and engaging academic environment that promoted active student involvement (Ravago, Reyes, Casipit, & Martinez, 2023).

Simultaneously, it is widely criticized for increasing students’ dependence on the Internet for information and social media networking, causing negative effects on their academic performance (Asanga, Essiet, Ukhurebor, Afolunso, & Hussaini, 2023).

Most researchers have agreed that the ability of young people to eliminate the disadvantages of media depends on their analytical skills. It was proved that the proper utilization of media could contribute to students’ learning competence and team building (Asanga, Essiet, Ukhurebor, Afolunso, & Hussaini, 2023; Rasyid, Hanjariyah & Aini, 2023). Chambers, Notley, Dezuanni, and Park (2022) explored young people’s attitudes toward media literacy, concentrating on its most crucial components to determine whether their significance level differed depending on an individual’s values. The findings showed that people were attracted to media literacy programs that reflected the values they held as the most important ones in their lives. Akcayoglu and Daggol (2019) pointed out that most students considered media helpful in learning a foreign language, and they regarded the Internet as the most important tool for media consumption.

Nonetheless, young people should be encouraged to benefit from media and learn how to minimize its negative effects. Zhang and Wu (2023) assessed the substantial progress young people had made in improving their English linguistic skills by means of analysis and evaluation of media content, noting the necessity of instructors fostering their critical thinking skills.

Recent studies in Ukrainian HEIs demonstrated enhancing critical thinking skills of students, their abilities to verify online content by using appropriate web resources and applying rational methods of search, selection,

systematization, and utilization of special online services in order to confront online content manipulation, their abilities to implement professional ideas. Nevertheless, a number of problems that they encountered were found, among them an insufficiently profound understanding of copyright law, an increasing amount of time spent online, and complications in the axiological approach to the media content (Garachkovska et al., 2022; Haidur et al., 2022; Poplavska et al., 2022).

2. Methodology

2.1 The Goal of the Investigation

This case study was conducted to answer the following questions:

Research Question 1: What is the overall attitude of Ukrainian HEI students towards media literacy and critical thinking skills fostering in EFL learning?

Research Question 2: How do Ukrainian HEI students perceive media literacy and the development of critical thinking skills in EFL learning after participating in the set of trainings?

2.2 Participants

A sample of 40 second-year undergraduate students was determined for the survey. The participants voluntarily got involved in it. Besides, the following characteristics of uniformity of the participants across several key dimensions were noted: 1) the students were within a narrow age range (from 19 to 23 years old); 2) they were obtaining bachelor's degrees in a daily format of study in agrarian HEI; 3) they demonstrated at least A2 level of the EFL proficiency as per the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). It was remarked that the gender of the participants had not been taken into account as it had not been considered a meaningful factor for the conducted research. The significant selection criterion was that the participants expressed willingness to enhance their media literacy and EFL competencies. Confidentiality and anonymity had been guaranteed to ensure their safety and respect of the participants during the study. Their informed consent had been obtained before the study began, and they were free to withdraw at any time if they wished to do so.

The university administration granted permission for the study to be conducted as a part of the Erasmus + Jean Monet Module project, "EU strategies extrapolation for boosting students' media literacy in Ukrainian HE" (2022).

2.3 Limitations

The study's findings are limited to the sample of participants and the institution where the research had taken place. It was conducted over a period of four months, from April to July 2023, during which the authors created the materials and tools for the study and collected and processed data for formulating outcomes. The obtained data were verified by cross-checking and member-checking.

Methodological limitations presupposed that the obtained outcomes were highly dependable on the context and case, along with the application of mostly exploratory and descriptive methods. The participants provided input on the significance of media literacy and the need for appropriate skills development and rendered feedback after engagement in the set of trainings. The time interval for this survey was limited to the mentioned term because that period involved a military invasion on the territory of Ukraine, supported by the hybrid war in information space, so students and academics worked under the conditions of constant ambiguity and stress, caused by fear for their physical and mental well-being.

2.4 Methods

Theoretical methods were used to prepare the tools and materials for the survey. They included analysis, synthesis, explanation, and generalization of obtained data. Psychological techniques were used to design research tools and interpret the outcomes of their application. Mathematical methods were applied to measure and assess the results of the study.

Empirical methods, namely pedagogical observation of the students-participants and the expert estimation method, were employed to acquire qualitative results. The survey was conducted by instructors and tutors monitoring the participants' attitudes towards media literacy training and their perception of media literacy's role and benefits in fostering critical thinking and EFL learning after participating in the training program.

A specially designed questionnaire was used to gather quantitative information on participants' attitudes and perceptions. The researchers took a comprehensive approach to develop a questionnaire that assesses students' media usage and needs in the field of media literacy. The aim was to capture a detailed understanding of students' habits,

preferences, and perceptions. The design process involved a thorough literature review, which helped identify key dimensions and variables relevant to media literacy. Based on established frameworks and previous research, a set of questions was crafted that covered various aspects such as media consumption patterns, trust in information sources, response to disinformation, and attitudes towards media literacy education. Response options were elaborated carefully to ensure a nuanced understanding of students' experiences and perceptions. The survey content was refined through pilot testing with a small group of participants to ensure its comprehensibility and relevance to the study objectives, as well as to clarify the wording.

The questionnaire was administered through Google Forms. Moreover, Google Forms automated the data calculation process, thereby eliminating the need for manual calculations by researchers. Specifically, Google Forms calculated the percentages ('p') for each response as described by the formula:

$$p = (f / F) * 100 \quad (1)$$

Where "p" is the percentage; "f" is the frequency of respondents for each statement; "F" is the total number of respondents. The calculated percentages are then rounded to the nearest integers, following established rounding rules. This automated calculation process ensured accuracy and minimized the potential for human error in data processing.

2.5 Procedures

On May 3-5, 2023, a set of trainings in the field of media literacy and critical thinking development was organized and held. The training was conducted as a series of Zoom video conferences using various online services, applications, and platforms. The use of Internet resources made it possible to ensure the format of live communication and joint interactive cooperation of all participants in the training process. In total, the training cycle lasted 30 hours.

The timely and easy registration of participants, as well as the collection of important information about the initial knowledge and skills of the participants in the field of media literacy and their expectations from the event, was carried out via Google Forms. Based on the stated expectations of the participants and the results of the discussion, the principles and rules of comfortable conditions of cooperation at the online training were created and posted on the online board Padlet.

In the informational unit of Module 1, "Media literacy as a key competence of today," with the help of a PowerPoint presentation, the listeners clarified the basic concepts regarding the types and variety of media, the essence of media literacy, and its components. They got acquainted with the leading documents of Ukraine and the EU regarding media literacy, analyzed the role and relevance of media literacy in Ukraine, and determined the importance of critical thinking for safe information consumption and effective activity in the media space.

The method of Socratic debate allowed the event participants to understand the new challenges facing Ukraine in the conditions of armed aggression and the dynamic development of information technologies, which required a clear response in matters of post-information security. Using the Trider platform, brainstorming was held by discussing the ground positions of the European Media Freedom Act (2022) and the Information Security Strategy of Ukraine (2021). During the Canva session, trainees had the opportunity to enhance their comprehension of the media concept, as well as their involvement in the community, by constructing their own mind maps. They explored the significance of media literacy in today's society and presented their approach to other participants.

During the development of Module 2, "Media manipulation: detection and countermeasures," the concept of "manipulation" was briefly presented to the participants. Viewing, analyzing, and discussing advertising photos and video materials made it possible to clarify the phenomenon of manipulative use of information in the media space using everyday examples.

At the next stage, in the form of an interactive online game ML_game from IREX, the participants got acquainted with the key phenomena related to the unreliable presentation of information (in particular, fake, disinformation, propaganda, commissioned material, etc.), learned the basic concepts and principles in the field of journalistic ethics, and also mastered practical skills in recognizing true and manipulative or falsified content. Using the capabilities of the Zoom platform, the participants in small groups in the separate session rooms of the video conference conducted a case study of situations on distinguishing different types of distorted information (in particular, disinformation, misinformation, and malformation) and its dissemination in the media space, discussed possible causes and consequences for society. Returning to the main session, the groups provided answers to the posed problematic questions and presented jointly formulated conclusions.

In the context of Module 3, “Create, consume, distribute critically (intelligently),” the participants learned about the signs of reliable European and Ukrainian media, received an appropriate list of them, and familiarized themselves with Ukrainian and internationally recognized resources and platforms for fact-checking using PowerPoint presentation materials. During the Socratic conversation and interactive work with headlines and photos, the participants acquired the skills to question them, verify them, identify informative and manipulative headlines, correlate the content of the headline and the presented material, as well as the correspondence of text and image, etc. The corresponding activities were performed using the online whiteboard, and then the participants had the opportunity to check the correctness of the performance according to the infographic in the presentation.

The training participants were introduced to the three-step technique of preventing the spread of false information: “Stop! – Think! – Check!”. They were engaged in a discussion of important actions for each stage and key questions that should be answered before distributing questionable content.

At the end of the training, participants had the opportunity to summarize the acquired knowledge, skills, and abilities and test them by answering online quiz questions according to the topic and tasks of the “Fact or Fake?” module on the Kahoot platform. Participants also had the opportunity to leave anonymous feedback about the event using Google Form

2.6 Data Collection and Analysis

At the commencement of the project, the authors were inclined to gain a comprehensive understanding of the students’ initial attitudes and needs for obtaining an overview of the participants’ media consumption habits, preferred sources of information, as well as young people’s perception of their own knowledge and skills level and gaps in terms of both media and EFL learning. The authors created a questionnaire that consisted of a series of 17 closed-ended questions. It is presented in Table 1. The students were asked to answer questions by choosing the option that best matches their preferences, habits, behavior, or happened predominantly.

Table 1. The Questionnaire on Students’ Media Usage and Needs in the Field of Media Literacy

Question	Options
1. Have you ever taken a media literacy course or studied the elements of media literacy integrated into any curriculum?	Yes. No. It is difficult to say.
2. How do you assess your own media literacy level	I do not have any knowledge or skills. I have a low level of knowledge and skills. I have an average level of knowledge and skills. I have a higher-than-average level of knowledge and skills. It is difficult to say.
3. What sources of information do you typically prefer?	Television. Radio. Newspaper. Internet (search systems, social networks, messengers, etc.).
4. How much time do you usually spend on media (TV, YouTube, Internet surfing, social networks, and communication in messengers)?	0-3 hours. 3-5 hours. 6-10 hours. I am constantly connected. It is difficult to say.
5. What social networks and messengers do you typically use? (Answering this question, you can choose 3 options that best match your preferences, habits, behavior, or happen most often)	YouTube TikTok Facebook Instagram Twitter Telegram Viber

	Other
6. What do you typically use media and digital devices for? (Answering this question, you can choose 3 options that best match your preferences, habits, behavior, or happens most often)	Networking Learning and researching Entertaining, watching shows, films, listening to music Reading /watching news
7. How do you typically choose content?	I search and choose myself. I read and watch the content that the network recommends. I rely on recommendations from parents, friends, acquaintances, teachers, etc. It is difficult to say.
8. Do you trust the information you receive from the media?	I absolutely trust all the information posted in all media I trust the information because I take it only from verified sources. I sometimes doubt the information posted in the media, but I do not check it. I often doubt the information in the media and often check it in other sources. I often doubt the information in the media and often check it in other sources.
9. Has your attitude to media content changed since the beginning of the war in Ukraine?	No, I use the same sources of information as before the war. It has not changed much: I choose content a little more attentively and carefully and only sometimes I notice fakes or misinformation. It has changed a lot: I choose content very attentively and carefully and monitor fakes, "hate speech," propaganda, etc. It is difficult to say.
10. Do you take any measures when meeting any elements of disinformation, propaganda, hate speech, etc.?	No, I do not, because I have never noticed such phenomena. No, I do not, although I notice such signs (because I do not want to spend time). No, I do not, although I notice such signs (because I do not know what can be done in such situations). Yes, I do. Sometimes, I inform about such phenomena: I sometimes send corresponding complaints. Yes, I do. I often inform about such phenomena: I often send corresponding complaints. Yes, I do. I always inform about such phenomena: I always send corresponding complaints.
11. Does your HEI encourage the use of digital technologies and media resources in teaching?	Yes. No. It is difficult to say.
12. Do you feel a need to master/improve your knowledge and skills in the field of media literacy?	Yes, it is very necessary. Yes, it is necessary. No, it is not necessary. It is difficult to say.
13. Is it necessary to introduce media literacy learning in the process of training a future specialist?	Yes, it is very necessary. Yes, it is necessary. No, it is not necessary. It is difficult to say.
14. Is it necessary to introduce media literacy learning into the process of learning a foreign	Yes, it is very necessary. Yes, it is necessary.

language?	No, it is not necessary. It is difficult to say.
15. Do you personally want to participate in training courses and events, including online, to improve your own media literacy?	Yes. No. It is difficult to say.
16. Will studying the EU experience in the context of spreading knowledge and skills on media literacy contribute to the development of critical thinking?	Yes. No. It is difficult to say.
17. What way of mastering or improving knowledge and skills in the field of media literacy do you consider the most appropriate? (Answering this question, you can choose 3 options that best match your preferences).	Courses in the Internet; Reading handbooks; Compulsory discipline in the HEI; Optional discipline in the HEI; Mastering different aspects of media literacy in the process of studying different disciplines in the educational institution; TV or radio program on media literacy; It is difficult to say

The second questionnaire was given to the participants after they had attended a training series. The participants were asked to give feedback through a Google Forms survey on the training’s content, methods, and overall effectiveness. Feedback was collected both quantitatively and qualitatively. The questionnaire contained closed-ended questions, where the participants rated various aspects of the training on a given scale, as well as open-ended questions where they could provide remarks and insights. It is presented in Table 2. The students were encouraged to write comments on their experience as well as questions and suggestions for improvement.

Table 2. Event Feedback on a Series of Media Literacy and Critical Thinking Training “Information: Truth and Fakes in Ukrainian and EU Media Space: Correlation with EU Practices.”

N	Rate your perception of the trainings	Rank from 1 to 5 (from not at all to very much)
1.	Did you feel prepared for the event?	
2.	How satisfied were you with the event?	
3.	How relevant and helpful was the event for your media literacy knowledge, skills, media consumption, and critical thinking development?	
4.	Did you find the activity of learning new terms in media literacy and their interpretation relevant?	
5.	Did you find the activity of distinguishing and using new terms and concepts through an interactive online game relevant?	
6.	Did you find the activity of analyzing and evaluating media content using new terms and concepts during interactive discussions and case studies relevant?	
7.	Did you find the summing-up and closing activity relevant?	
8.	How satisfied were you with the session content? Write your insight	
9.	Write down three things you learned during the event from the material (both presented and discussed):	
10.	Note two things that you found interesting and would like to learn more:	
11.	Record one question you still have about the topic:	

3. Results and Discussion

It was crucial for educators and policymakers to reveal how the students perceived their media literacy levels and needs in order to design effective strategies for media education. Regarding the questionnaire about students’ media usage and needs in the realm of media literacy, the noteworthy observations were thematically categorized. Furthermore, it was considered to be essential to incorporate some diagrams that illustrated the study’s findings.

3.1 Findings about the overall attitude of Ukrainian HEI students towards media literacy and critical thinking skills fostering in EFL learning (based on Questionnaire on Students' Media Usage and Needs in the Field of Media Literacy)

3.1.1 Media Literacy Course Enrolment and Self-assessment of Media Literacy Level

The first set of questions (Q 1 and Q 2) addressed participants' engagement with media literacy education. More than half (55.6%) of the respondents reported that they had never taken any media literacy course, indicating a potential gap in media literacy education.

Regarding self-assessment of media literacy (Q 2), only 11% of the participants considered themselves to have "a high level of knowledge and skills". At the same time, a significant proportion (36.1%) assessed their media literacy level as "average", while 25% rated their skills as "low". This suggested that a significant number of individuals perceived themselves as having insufficient media literacy skills that were essential in the modern world, noting the importance of enhancing and advancing one's education in this area.

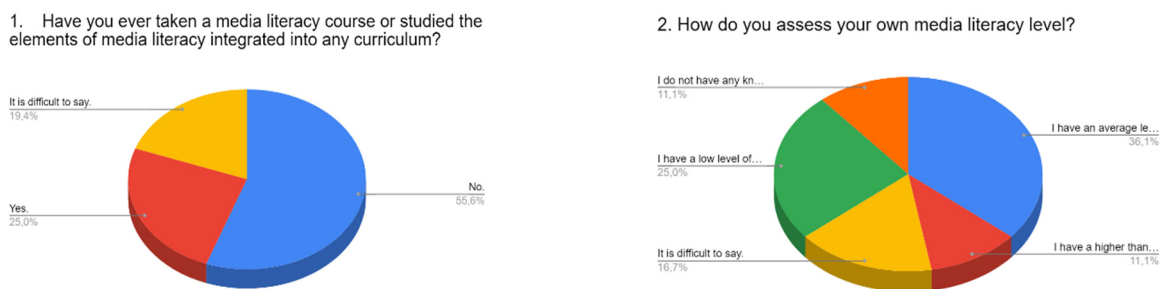


Figure 1. Media Literacy Course Enrolment and Self-assessment of Media Literacy Level (QQ 1-2)

The findings are in line with the previous studies in Ukrainian HEIs, which revealed that the greater majority of students considered their level of media literacy to be basic and expressed aspiration for self-development in the aspect of improving media competence and the skill of a critical attitude to information sources (Ivanytska, Petrov, Kuzmenko, Burmak, & Sakevych, 2023; Haidur et al., 2022).

3.1.2 Preferred Sources of Information and Media Consumption Habits

Preferred sources of information and media consumption habits were investigated in questions 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 (QQ 3, 4, 5, 6, 7). The survey findings from the third question (Q 3) revealed that a vast majority (94.1%) of the participants preferred obtaining information from the internet, including search engines, social networks, and messengers. This underscored the dominant role of digital media in the current information landscape, with traditional sources such as television and radio receiving comparatively lower preference (5.6% in sum) among the respondents. This shift towards digital media aligned with the prevailing trends of the contemporary era.

In response to question 4 (Q 4), it was discovered that a minimum of 66.6% of the surveyed individuals dedicated no less than three hours per day to media usage. To be more precise, 47.2% of the participants spent three to five hours, while 19.4% of the students spent six to ten hours. Additionally, 14.7% of the students reported being "constantly connected" to media. This raises concerns about the quality of the content consumed and the level of critical thinking applied.

With regards to question 5 (Q 5) addressing social media preferences, our analysis of user choices showed a notable trend towards visually oriented and interactive content platforms. Specifically, TikTok was the most popular choice selected by 67.6% of the respondents. Instagram and Telegram followed close behind at 82.4% and 94.1%, respectively. These findings suggested that a marked preference for those platforms might significantly impact shaping attitudes and behaviors of users.

6. What do you typically use modern media and digital devices for? (Answering this question you can choose 3 options that best match your preferences, habits, behavior, or happen most often).



Figure 2. Purposes For Which Modern Media and Digital Devices Are Utilized (Q 6)

Question 6 (Q6) focused on the purposes for which modern media and digital devices were utilized. According to the students' reports, the most frequent applications were "Entertaining" (83.3%) and "Networking" (66.7%), emphasizing the recreational and social aspects of media consumption. Simultaneously, there was also a recognition of the educational and informative benefits of digital media, with "Learning and researching" (58.3%) and "Reading/watching news" (61.1%) being frequent selections. Overall, these results indicated that media served a diverse range of young people's needs.

In response to question 7 (Q 7), a considerable majority of the participants (72.2%) expressed their preference for individual content selection practices rather than relying on personalized algorithms or content delivery networks to shape their media consumption. This finding suggested that users prioritized their own independence in their media consumption choices.

These findings are in accordance with the report presented by the commission of Civil Network OPORA (2023) during the period from May 11 to June 12, 2023, which showed the greatest popularity of social media platforms among Ukrainians aged 18-29, who pointed them out as a main source of information), while television had the second place in terms of popularity, whereas radio and print media were used by the minority of the responded. Similar data are reported by scholars who have studied the media preferences of HEI students in other countries. They found out that the vast majority of students preferred online news, both national and international, singling out the rise in the importance of social media and non-mainstream news for the generation of millennials (Al Subaihi, 2023; Akcayoglu & Daggol, 2019).

3.1.3 Trust in Media Information and Response to Disinformation

Trust in media information and response to disinformation was verified in questions 8, 9, and 10 (QQ 8, 9, 10). The participants showed varying levels of trust in media information, answering question 8 (Q 8). Only 8% of the participants indicated absolute trust in all media, while 13.9% claimed to consume and trust information only from verified sources. A significant number (44.4%) reported occasional doubt in media content without verifying it. At the same time, 33% expressed skepticism and a tendency to verify information from multiple sources. This indicated a reasonable degree of media literacy awareness among respondents but also highlighted the relevance of media literacy education in helping students critically evaluate information sources.

According to the responses provided in question 9 (Q 9) about the influence of the war in Ukraine on media consumption, it was found out that approximately 27.8% of students had undergone a notable shift in their perception of media content, whereas 44.4% had not experienced a substantial change since the beginning of the war. Nevertheless, this change indicated that young people were becoming increasingly conscious of the possibility of disinformation, propaganda, and hate speech during turmoil.

Question 10 (Q 10) of the survey inquired about the actions taken by the participants to counter disinformation, propaganda, or hate speech in media. The results showed that a significant percentage of the respondents (50%) reported taking action at least sometimes, with 8.3% reporting often and 2.8% reporting consistently. Conversely,

19.4% stated that they had not noticed such facets. These findings indicated a proactive approach of some participants to combat misleading or distorted content while others might require media literacy training and improvement of appropriate knowledge and skills.

10. Do you take any measures when meeting any elements of disinformation, propaganda, hate speech, etc.?

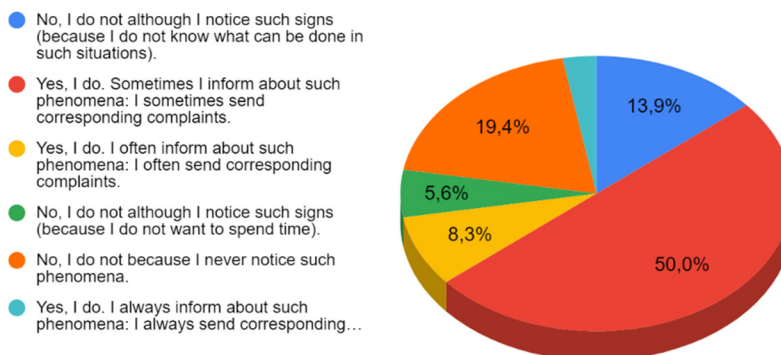


Figure 3. Actions Taken by the Participants to Counter Disinformation, Propaganda, or Hate Speech in Media (Q10)

These findings are conforming the latest research where the essential concern of young people about fake news is expressed as it could damage the public trust in democratic institutions and mainstream media. People strive for critical thinking and digital sources verification, self-efficacy in detecting misinformation, and the motivation to authenticate information (van Zoonen, Luoma-aho, Lievonen, 2024; Ognyanova, Lazer, Robertson, & Wilson, 2020).

3.1.4 Need for Media Literacy Education and EU Experience

Although media education is important nowadays, scientists have no consensus on how media literacy should be integrated with education. The interdisciplinary nature of media literacy and the need for it to be acquired by students of various levels and fields indicate the need to integrate media culture into traditional disciplines to help students understand fundamental theories and basic knowledge concerning the media (Guo, 2021; Lokshyna & Prykhodkina, 2020). Other scholars argue that media literacy should be taught as a separate compulsory course with a special curriculum at different university faculties (Krylova-Grek & Shyshkina, 2020; Dolanbay, 2022).

The need for media literacy education and EU experience was explored in Questions 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17 (QQ 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17). According to survey question 11 (Q11), an overwhelming majority of participants (72.2%) indicated that their HEI had promoted using digital technologies and media resources in the learning experience. This signified that students appreciated the steps made by Ukrainian providers to incorporate these tools into education, acknowledging their potential and benefits in enhancing the learning standard. According to the results of questions 12-15 (QQ 12-15), a majority of the participants (61.3%) believed it was necessary to improve media literacy skills, with 22.2% considering it to be very necessary. They also emphasized the importance of incorporating media literacy education into general education (77.8%) and foreign language learning (88.9%). This acknowledgment highlighted the cross-disciplinary relevance and necessity of media literacy in today's education landscape. Additionally, 63.9% of those surveyed expressed willingness to attend training courses or events to enhance their media literacy knowledge and skills. This substantial interest signified a strong desire among students to engage actively in learning opportunities related to media literacy, highlighted the value of media literacy as a crucial skill, and emphasized the role of education in meeting this growing demand.

In investigating the most preferred approach for mastering or improving media literacy skills (Q 17), a diverse range of perspectives among respondents was uncovered. Notably, 30.6% of the participants considered integrating the media literacy aspects into various academic disciplines. This result demonstrated the potential for interdisciplinary education in media literacy, which could be seamlessly integrated into existing curricula. Furthermore, it was worth noting that 13.9% of the survey respondents expressed a desire for optional media literacy classes, highlighting the need for educational institutions to provide diverse learning opportunities that satisfy varying learning styles and preferences. It was also interesting to note that 25% of the participants relied on Internet courses for their media literacy education, highlighting the role of online resources alongside traditional teaching methods to meet students'

needs.

Based on question 16 (Q 16) of the media literacy survey, an optimistic 73.5% of the participants were of the opinion that delving into the EU experience could significantly enhance their critical thinking skills. Conversely, a mere 2.9% of the respondents felt it would not add any value to their critical thinking abilities. The results suggested a promising outlook towards the potential benefits of studying the EU experience.

In analyzing the responses from the questionnaire on students' media usage and needs in the field of media literacy, a noteworthy pattern emerged. A number of the respondents frequently selected the option "It is difficult to say." This phenomenon could be attributed to various factors, including the complexity or novelty of the subject matter or recognition of media literacy as a multifaceted concept, making it challenging for some participants to formulate a definite viewpoint. This reaction underscored the need for further exploration and clarification in both research and educational initiatives associated with media literacy, highlighting the intricate and multi-dimensional nature of this critical skillset. These findings mirrored previous studies that had determined the purpose of critical thinking as not criticism but rather the necessity to create distance, to realize why and how the information had emerged, as well as to verify it and its sources (Majerczak & Strzelecki, 2022).

In essence, the observations emphasized the variety of attitudes, perceptions, and approaches that students had preferred enhancing their media literacy and critical thinking in EFL. They accentuated the significance of integrating media literacy into standard academic disciplines, for example, foreign language acquisition, along with the possibility of offering specialized media literacy programs, for instance, in foreign languages, to meet the evolving needs of contemporary learners. Analysis of those outcomes alongside existing literature and educational practices provided valuable guidance on the prospective trajectory of media literacy education. The abundance of media resources provides teachers with a unique opportunity to teach EFL on authentic materials to their students. However, it should go along with critical literacy practice resources, namely, theoretical basis and critical media literacy principles, material and media selection, student characteristics and language level, students' and educators' skills to analyze credible information sources, their ability to process information, analyze and critique text, produce and distribute information (Afrilyasanti, Basthomi, Zen, & Fauziah, 2023; Lushchyk, Pikulytska, & Tsyhanok, 2021; McDougall, Supa, van Driel, & Sternadel, 2018).

3.2 Findings about Ukrainian HEI Students' Perception of Media Literacy and Critical Thinking Skills Fostering in EFL Learning after Participating in the set of Trainings (based on the Event Feedback Questionnaire on training sessions "Information: Truth and Fakes in Ukrainian and EU Media Space: Correlation with EU Practices").

After the series of English-language media literacy and critical thinking trainings focusing on Ukrainian and EU media space correlation, substantial feedback was obtained through Google Forms, aimed to assess the attitudes of Ukrainian HEI students towards media literacy and critical thinking development in the context of EFL learning. The collected data represented useful insights into students' perceptions and experiences in the area.

Based on the survey results, it appeared that 75% of the respondents felt adequately prepared for the event. This suggested that the communication and materials provided before the event successfully conveyed essential information. Furthermore, this level of preparedness might have positively impacted attendees' engagement and learning outcomes.

The event received a 100% satisfaction rating from all respondents. In regards to its impact on enhancing media literacy knowledge, skills, media consumption, and critical thinking development, 33.3% of the participants found it to be very relevant, while 66.7% of the respondents found it to be "very much" relevant. These findings are in line with the study of Dolanbay (2022), where almost all participants revealed an increase in their media literacy awareness after the set of media training. They also demonstrated that the event had been highly influential in addressing these aspects. Such enthusiastic feedback reflected the effective implementation of the program and its capacity to meet the needs of its audience. The participants were asked to identify the most relevant activity among four options (learning new terms, interactive online games, analyzing and evaluating media content, and summing up), and they found everything provided highly relevant to their learning experience. It was indicated that interactive and cooperative activities, including discussions and case studies, effectively engaged students in applying media literacy concepts to real-world scenarios, promoting active learning. Besides, incorporating a diverse range of activities in subsequent events was beneficial to a broader audience.

Insights from written participants' comments provided valuable perspectives on the impact of the media literacy and critical thinking training event as well as fostering EFL learning. Reporting on the takeaways from the session, attendees emphasized the significant role of media literacy in discerning credible sources, the practical application of

new terminology in media analysis, and the critical importance of enhancing critical thinking skills for evaluating media content. Participants also expressed a keen interest in comprehending how media literacy operates in diverse cultures and its influence on information dissemination and decision-making. Additionally, they requested further training events that focused on enhancing strategies for daily media consumption and critical thinking, mastering specific tools to improve media literacy skills, and investigating the impact of media literacy on societal and political issues.

In brief, the obtained feedback indicated a positive outlook from Ukrainian HEI students regarding their attitude toward media literacy and critical thinking fostering in the context of EFL learning. The enthusiastic response, high level of satisfaction, and interest in further exploring related topics underscored the importance of continued efforts to integrate media literacy into the educational curriculum.

4. Conclusions

Thus, within the framework of the Jean Monnet Module project on media education, the main task of which is to prepare young people for life in modern information conditions, their appropriate perception of various kinds of information, their awareness of the consequences of media influence on the human psyche, mastering ways of communication, based on non-verbal forms of communication with the help of technical means and modern digital technologies, media literacy is implemented as the ability of young people to interact with media flows adequately in the global information space.

While exploring the first research question of the study, it was revealed that a considerable number of participating students perceived themselves as being insufficiently media literacy skilled, yet aware of the necessity of enhancing and advancing their abilities in this area. It can be explained by the complexity of media literacy as a multifaceted concept, stimulating some participants to search for various opinions and viewpoints. The outcomes of the study showed that young people were becoming increasingly conscious of the possibility of disinformation, propaganda, and hate speech during turmoil. These findings also indicated some participants' proactive approach to combat misleading or distorted content, while others required media literacy training and improvement of appropriate knowledge and skills.

The second research question of the study vectored to monitor the progress Ukrainian HEI students had made after taking part in the set of trainings, disclosed that the majority of respondents had approved the materials and activities of the event and its influence on improving their level of media literacy and critical thinking skills, competent consumption of media products and discerning credible sources of information. Therefore, it was concluded that Ukrainian HEI students were mainly motivated and satisfied with the possibility of gaining knowledge about the forms of influence of media content on young people, obtaining a clear understanding of the process of mass communication and media algorithms and their effects in the context of the real world.

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