

Media Literacy and Critical Thinking Skills Among Grade 12 Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS) Students in a Private Senior High School in Laguna, Philippines

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between media literacy and critical thinking skills among Grade 12 Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS) students in a private senior high school in Laguna, Philippines. The study was anchored on Potter's Cognitive Approach, Masterman's Teaching the Media, Facione's Critical Thinking Framework, Anderson and Krathwohl's Revised Taxonomy, and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which collectively explain the development of media literacy and higher-order thinking skills. A descriptive-comparative-correlational research design was employed involving 56 Grade 12 HUMSS students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using a validated self-developed questionnaire that measured five dimensions of media literacy and five dimensions of critical thinking. Descriptive statistics, the Mann-Whitney U test, Kruskal-Wallis test, Shapiro-Wilk test, and Spearman's rho were used to analyze the data. The findings revealed that respondents demonstrated high levels of media literacy and critical thinking, with media access, analytical thinking, and self-regulation obtaining the highest ratings, while evaluation, interpretation, and critical assessment received comparatively lower ratings. No significant differences were found in media literacy and critical thinking across respondents' demographic and media-use characteristics. However, a significant positive relationship was identified between media literacy and critical thinking, indicating that students with stronger media literacy also exhibited higher levels of critical thinking. The study concludes that integrating media literacy into classroom instruction can strengthen students' analytical, evaluative, and responsible engagement with digital media. It recommends enhancing instruction through fact-checking, media analysis, guided discussions, debates, research tasks, and reflective learning, while future studies should involve larger, multi-institutional samples and examine additional variables. The study supports Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4: Quality Education by promoting media literacy and critical thinking as essential competencies for lifelong learning and SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions by encouraging responsible media engagement and informed information evaluation. Its findings contribute to educational and digital sustainability by informing curriculum enhancement, instructional planning, and the development of responsible, reflective, and critically engaged learners.

Keywords: Analysis, Critical Thinking, Digital Literacy, Grade 12 HUMSS Students, Media Literacy, Media and Information Literacy, Self-Regulation, Senior High School, Social Media, Sustainable Development Goals (Sdgs)

1. Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital technology has transformed how students access information, communicate, and construct knowledge. As media becomes an essential source of learning and interaction, Senior High School students are increasingly exposed to diverse digital content that requires critical analysis and informed judgment (Dimacangun & Guillena, 2023). Consequently, media literacy and critical thinking have become complementary competencies that enable learners to evaluate information, recognize bias and misinformation, and make reasoned decisions (Dame Adjin-Tetty, 2022). Media literacy promotes the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and use media responsibly (Livingstone, 2004), while critical thinking develops learners' capacity for interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation (Facione, 1990; Ennis, 2005; Paul and Elder, 2016). Collectively, these competencies support responsible participation in digital environments and informed engagement with media (Hobbs, 2017; UNESCO, 2013). Emerging literature suggests that media literacy and critical thinking are closely interconnected. Learners who effectively access, analyze, evaluate, and create media content are more capable of assessing information credibility, cross-checking evidence, and making informed decisions (Hobbs, 2017; Mihailidis & Thevenin, 2013; Udoudom et al., 2023; Gonzalez et al., 2023; De Abreu, 2021). Media-based learning activities further strengthen both competencies by encouraging analytical reasoning and responsible media engagement (Zankova, 2018; Fajardo, 2023). Despite this growing body of evidence, limited studies have directly examined the relationship between media literacy and critical thinking among Grade 12

Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS) students in Philippine private senior high schools. This study addresses this gap by determining students' levels of media literacy and critical thinking skills, examining differences across selected demographic and media-use characteristics, and investigating the relationship between these competencies.

1.1 Background of Media Literacy and Critical Thinking Skills among Grade 12 HUMSS Students

Digital media has become a dominant platform for communication, learning, and information sharing. In the Philippine context, extensive media exposure has increased the importance of developing students' ability to critically engage with information. Media literacy equips learners with competencies to access, analyze, evaluate, interpret, and ethically use media content (Livingstone, 2018; UNESCO, 2013; Potter, 2010; Al Zou'bi, 2021; De Abreu, 2021). These competencies are particularly important as students navigate online environments where misinformation, bias, and persuasive content are increasingly prevalent. Critical thinking complements media literacy by enabling learners to examine evidence, evaluate arguments, and make logical judgments. It involves cognitive processes such as interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation that support informed reasoning and decision-making (Ennis, 2005; Paul and Elder, 2016; Facione, 1990). Classroom activities that integrate media literacy encourage students to evaluate the credibility of information, analyze media messages, and produce responsible media content, thereby strengthening higher-order thinking skills (Hobbs, 2017; UNESCO, 2013). Within the Philippine K to 12 curriculum, Media and Information Literacy (MIL) serves as an essential subject that develops students' understanding of media as a communication tool while promoting ethical and critical media use (Media and Information Literacy Curriculum Guide, n.d.). However, previous findings indicate that although Filipino students frequently obtain information through social media, they continue to experience challenges in evaluating the credibility of online information (Abanco et al., 2025). Consequently, strengthening media literacy instruction remains necessary to improve students' critical engagement with digital information (Hobbs, 2017).

1.2 Themes and Insights on Media Literacy and Critical Thinking among Grade 12 HUMSS Students

The literature consistently identifies media literacy as a multidimensional competency involving access, analysis, evaluation, creation, and responsible participation in media environments (Arke & Primack, 2010; Potter, 2010; Livingstone, 2018; UNESCO, 2013). Contemporary frameworks further emphasize learners' awareness, informed media use, and digital competencies as essential skills for the twenty-first century (Kalayci & Esgi, 2024; Amalliah et al., 2025; Alfian & Nurchaerani, 2025). These competencies enable students to distinguish factual information from subjective claims, recognize bias, evaluate source credibility, and responsibly communicate information across digital platforms. Similarly, critical thinking is consistently described as a higher-order cognitive process involving reasoned judgment, evidence-based evaluation, and reflective thinking (Ennis, 2005; Paul and Elder, 2016). Facione's (1990) framework identifies interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation as the core components of critical thinking, which are fundamental to evaluating information, constructing logical conclusions, and justifying decisions. Instructional approaches emphasizing problem-solving, reflective thinking, and argument analysis further contribute to the development of these competencies (Bissonnette, Chastenay, & Francoeur, 2021). Research further demonstrates a strong conceptual relationship between media literacy and critical thinking. Students who effectively analyze, evaluate, and create media content are generally better equipped to assess credibility, verify information across multiple sources, and make informed decisions (Hobbs, 2017; Mihailidis & Thevenin, 2013; Udoudom et al., 2023). Moreover, media-based learning activities enhance both competencies by promoting critical analysis, content creation, and reflective engagement with information (Zankova, 2018). These findings collectively support the integration of media literacy instruction as a means of strengthening students' critical thinking skills.

1.3 Global, National, and Local Context of Media Literacy and Critical Thinking among Grade 12 HUMSS Students

Globally, the rapid expansion of digital technology has transformed media into a primary source of information and communication, increasing the need for individuals to critically evaluate media messages and make informed decisions (Livingstone, 2004; Hobbs, 2017; UNESCO, 2013). As learners become increasingly dependent on digital platforms, competencies in media literacy and critical thinking have become essential for identifying bias, misinformation, persuasive intent, and source credibility (Dame Adjin-Tettey, 2022; Ana et al., 2021; Al-Rawi & Al-Rawi, 2017). Studies likewise indicate that learners who possess strong media literacy skills are more capable of assessing information credibility, cross-checking evidence, and reasoning logically (Hobbs, 2017; Mihailidis & Thevenin, 2013; Udoudom et al., 2023). Nationally, media exposure is particularly significant in the Philippines, where Filipinos spend approximately 4.12 hours daily on social media, making the country one of the world's highest users of digital platforms (Uy-Tioco & Cabañes, 2021). While widespread media use facilitates communication, learning, and social interaction, it also exposes students to misinformation and unreliable online content. The Philippine K to 12 curriculum addresses this challenge through the Media and Information Literacy (MIL) subject, which develops learners' competencies in accessing, analyzing, evaluating, and ethically using media (Media and Information Literacy Curriculum Guide, n.d.; UNESCO, 2013). Nevertheless, previous studies indicate that although Filipino students frequently access information through social media, many still experience difficulty evaluating the credibility of online information (Abanco et al., 2025), emphasizing the continuing need to strengthen media literacy instruction (Hobbs, 2017). Locally, Senior High School students, particularly those enrolled in

the Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS) strand, are expected to demonstrate competencies in communication, social inquiry, and critical analysis. Existing Philippine studies have examined related areas, including media literacy and reading comprehension among Grade 12 HUMSS students (Abanco et al., 2025) and the relationship between social media use and critical thinking among Senior High School learners (Duterte, 2025). However, these investigations do not directly examine how media literacy competencies relate to critical thinking skills among HUMSS students in private senior high schools. This study therefore focuses on Grade 12 HUMSS students in a private school in Laguna, Philippines, to provide empirical evidence on these interrelated competencies.

1.4 Theoretical and Conceptual Basis of Media Literacy and Critical Thinking Skills

This study is anchored on theoretical perspectives that explain how learners process, interpret, evaluate, and apply media information in developing higher-order thinking skills. James Potter's Cognitive Approach serves as the primary theoretical foundation, proposing that learners actively construct meaning by organizing and interpreting media messages using their prior knowledge, experiences, and cognitive structures. This perspective explains how Grade 12 HUMSS students process media information and how cognitive engagement contributes to the development of critical thinking skills. The study further draws from Len Masterman's *Teaching the Media* (1985), which emphasizes critical autonomy by encouraging learners to question media messages, recognize embedded values, ideologies, and biases, and evaluate media independently rather than merely acquiring technical media skills. This perspective supports the dimensions of media literacy examined in the study, including access to media, analysis of media messages, evaluation of media credibility and bias, creation and sharing of media content, and participation and engagement. Critical thinking is primarily grounded in Facione's (1990) framework, which identifies interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation as the core components of critical thinking. These dimensions correspond directly to the competencies assessed in the study. Complementing this framework, Anderson and Krathwohl's (2001) Revised Taxonomy of Educational Objectives explains that higher-order cognitive processes involve analyzing information, evaluating source credibility, and creating informed responses. The relationship between media literacy and critical thinking is further explained through Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, particularly the concepts of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and mediated learning. From this perspective, media functions as a cultural tool that supports higher-order cognitive development. Through analyzing media messages, evaluating credibility, and creating media content, learners engage in cognitive processes that foster critical thinking. Collectively, these theoretical perspectives provide the foundation for examining the levels of media literacy and critical thinking skills and their relationship among Grade 12 HUMSS students. The study's conceptual framework consists of two primary variables: media literacy and critical thinking skills. Media literacy is measured through access to media, analysis of media messages, evaluation of media credibility and bias, creation and sharing of media content, and participation and engagement. Critical thinking skills are measured through analysis, interpretation, evaluation and inference, explanation, and self-regulation. The framework also incorporates demographic and media-use profile variables for comparative analyses while examining the correlational relationship between the two primary constructs.

1.5 Research Gaps and Rationale for Examining Media Literacy and Critical Thinking among Grade 12 HUMSS Students

Despite the growing recognition of media literacy and critical thinking as complementary competencies, limited research has directly examined their relationship among Senior High School students in the Philippine context. Existing studies have primarily focused on related but distinct areas, including the relationship between media literacy and reading comprehension among Grade 12 HUMSS students (Abanco et al., 2025) and the association between social media use and critical thinking skills among Senior High School learners (Duterte, 2025). Although these investigations provide valuable insights into students' media engagement and cognitive development, they do not specifically examine how media literacy competencies relate to critical thinking skills among Grade 12 HUMSS students. This research addresses this gap by examining the levels of media literacy and critical thinking skills among Grade 12 HUMSS students in a private senior high school in Laguna, Philippines. Specifically, it investigates students' competencies in accessing, analyzing, evaluating, and using media content alongside their ability to interpret information, make reasoned judgments, construct logical conclusions, and regulate their thinking. The study also determines whether demographic and media-use characteristics are associated with differences in these competencies and examines the relationship between media literacy and critical thinking skills. The findings are expected to provide empirical evidence that can inform instructional strategies, curriculum enhancement, and educational initiatives promoting responsible media engagement, evidence-based reasoning, and reflective learning within the HUMSS strand.

1.6 Alignment of the Study on Media Literacy and Critical Thinking Skills with Relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The study aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) by emphasizing the development of media literacy and critical thinking skills that enable learners to analyze information, evaluate evidence, and make informed decisions. Strengthening these competencies supports quality learning experiences that prepare students to become responsible, reflective, and independent learners capable of navigating increasingly complex digital information environments. This alignment is reflected in the study's focus on enhancing media literacy education and fostering higher-

order thinking through classroom instruction (Hobbs, 2017; UNESCO, 2013). The study also supports SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) by promoting responsible media consumption, ethical information use, and the ability to recognize bias, misinformation, and disinformation. Developing these competencies contributes to informed citizenship and responsible participation in digital environments by encouraging learners to critically evaluate media content before accepting or sharing information (Dame Adjin-Tettey, 2022; UNESCO, 2013).

1.7 Importance of the Study on Media Literacy and Critical Thinking Skills to Multidisciplinary Sustainability

The study contributes primarily to educational sustainability by providing empirical evidence on the relationship between media literacy and critical thinking skills among Grade 12 HUMSS students. Its findings may support curriculum enhancement, instructional planning, and the integration of learning activities that strengthen students' analytical reasoning, evidence-based decision-making, and reflective learning. Such initiatives contribute to sustaining quality education that equips learners with competencies required in contemporary digital environments. The study likewise contributes to technological and digital sustainability by encouraging the responsible, ethical, and critical use of digital media. As students increasingly rely on online platforms for communication and learning, strengthening media literacy and critical thinking promotes responsible engagement with digital technologies, informed evaluation of online information, and ethical media participation (Livingstone, 2018; UNESCO, 2013; Hobbs, 2017). Finally, the study supports community and socio-economic sustainability by fostering informed, responsible, and critically engaged individuals who are better equipped to participate in society and respond to the challenges posed by misinformation and rapidly evolving digital communication. By promoting responsible media engagement and evidence-based reasoning, the study contributes to the development of learners who can participate more effectively in academic, social, and civic contexts.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study utilized a descriptive-comparative-correlational research design, a non-experimental quantitative approach that describes existing characteristics, compares differences among pre-existing groups, and examines relationships between variables without manipulation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The descriptive component was used to determine the respondents' demographic profile, the comparative component examined differences in media literacy and critical thinking skills across demographic and media-use variables, and the correlational component investigated the relationship between media literacy and critical thinking skills.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in a private senior high school in San Pedro, Laguna, Philippines. The institution offers basic education from kindergarten to senior high school, with the Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS) strand as one of its academic programs.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents were 56 Grade 12 HUMSS students enrolled in the private senior high school. Participants were selected because they were active users of different forms of media, particularly digital and social media platforms, making their experiences relevant to the variables investigated.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The study employed purposive sampling. Respondents were included if they were Grade 12 HUMSS students, active users of various forms of media, particularly digital and social media, and voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. These criteria ensured that participants were appropriate for the constructs under investigation, consistent with the principles of purposive sampling described by Creswell and Guetterman (2019). A screening questionnaire was administered before the survey, and only qualified respondents completed the research instrument.

2.5 Research Instrument

Data were collected using a self-developed questionnaire that underwent face and content validation by experts in language education, research, and statistics to ensure content relevance, clarity, appropriateness of language, and alignment with the study objectives. The instrument measured media literacy across five dimensions: access to media, analysis of media messages, evaluation of media credibility and bias, creation and sharing of media content, and participation and engagement. Critical thinking skills were assessed using five dimensions: analysis, interpretation, evaluation and inference, explanation, and self-regulation. Following expert validation, the instrument was pilot-tested among 20 HUMSS students from another senior high school. Reliability analysis yielded Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .933 for the media literacy scale and .908 for the critical thinking skills scale, indicating excellent internal consistency (George & Mallery, 2019). Responses were measured using a four-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

The questionnaire was administered through Google Forms over a one-month data collection period. Before participation, respondents were informed of the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits, and their rights as research participants. Participation was voluntary, and anonymity and confidentiality were maintained in accordance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using frequency and percentage distributions to describe the respondents' demographic profile, while weighted mean and standard deviation were used to determine the levels of media literacy and critical thinking skills. Interpretation of correlation coefficients followed the guidelines suggested by Evans (1996). The Kruskal–Wallis test examined differences among groups with more than two categories, whereas the Mann–Whitney U test analyzed differences between two-group variables. Spearman's rho (rs) was used to determine the relationship between media literacy and critical thinking skills. Prior to inferential analysis, data normality was assessed using the Shapiro–Wilk test, which indicated a non-normal distribution. Boxplots and standardized scores were also examined for extreme outliers, with no cases exceeding the ± 3.29 criterion (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019), supporting the use of Spearman's rho for the correlational analysis.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Level of Media Literacy among Grade 12 HUMSS Students

3.1.1 Access to Media

The respondents demonstrated a very high level of media literacy in terms of access to media. They were highly capable of selecting appropriate information sources, using digital tools to locate credible information, narrowing searches through keywords and filters, choosing suitable media platforms, and considering the safety and reliability of websites before use. Among these indicators, evaluating website safety and reliability received the highest rating, while selecting relevant information sources and finding credible information through digital tools obtained the lowest ratings, although both remained within the very high level. These findings are consistent with Baterna et al. (2020), who found SHS students demonstrating moderate to high media literacy in accessing information, and with Svedholm-Häkkinen et al. (2025), who observed that learners often encounter challenges in evaluating the credibility of online information. The results suggest that while respondents possess strong information-access skills, further development in assessing the trustworthiness of digital content remains important.

3.1.2 Analysis of Media Messages

The respondents exhibited a high level of media literacy in analyzing media messages. They effectively differentiated facts, opinions, and assumptions, recognized the purpose and intent of media content, identified persuasive techniques, and analyzed media messages. However, comparing information across multiple media sources received the lowest rating, although it remained within the high level. These findings align with Breakstone et al. (2021) and Fernández (2021), who emphasized that learners often struggle to compare and interpret information across multiple digital sources. Similarly, Abanco et al. (2025) emphasized the need to strengthen students' ability to evaluate information from different media sources. The findings indicate that although respondents possess strong analytical skills, cross-source evaluation remains an area for further improvement.

3.1.3 Evaluation of Media Credibility and Bias

The findings showed that respondents had a high level of competence in evaluating media credibility and bias. They effectively identified bias in news reports and online content, recognized misleading visuals, headlines, and language, assessed source authority, and evaluated media credibility. Assessing whether information was distorted received the lowest rating, although it still fell within the high category. These findings are partly consistent with Fajardo (2023), who found that students were generally more proficient in identifying bias than verifying distorted information. Likewise, Breakstone et al. (2019) observed that adolescents more easily recognize explicit indicators of misleading content than perform deeper verification. The results suggest that respondents are capable of identifying obvious forms of bias, but strengthening fact-checking and cross-source verification skills remains necessary.

3.1.4 Creation and Sharing of Media Content

The respondents demonstrated a high level of media literacy in creating and sharing media content. They consistently reported producing understandable content, ensuring the accuracy and trustworthiness of shared information, acknowledging the work of others, considering the effects of their online posts, and using digital tools responsibly. These findings indicate responsible and ethical practices in digital content creation. These findings support Leu et al. (2013), who emphasized critical thinking and ethical responsibility in media creation, and Hobbs (2010), who highlighted that students should become responsible creators as well as consumers of digital content. The results suggest that respondents generally practice responsible digital citizenship in creating and sharing media.

3.1.5 Participation and Engagement

The respondents exhibited a high level of participation and engagement in media use. They actively used media to remain informed, collaborate with others through digital platforms, understand their responsibilities as media users, and participate positively in educational and community-related activities. Participation in discussions on social and educational issues received the lowest rating but remained within the high level. These findings support Leu et al. (2013), who described media literacy as promoting active and responsible digital participation, and Hobbs (2010), who emphasized participation and engagement as essential components of responsible media use. The findings indicate that respondents generally engage with digital media in constructive and responsible ways.

3.1.6 Overall Media Literacy

Overall, the respondents demonstrated a high level of media literacy. Access to media emerged as the strongest domain with a very high rating, while analysis of media messages, evaluation of media credibility and bias, creation and sharing of media content, and participation and engagement were all rated high. These findings indicate that respondents are proficient in accessing and using media but show comparatively lower performance in higher-order evaluative competencies. These findings are consistent with Hobbs (2010), who emphasized that media literacy extends beyond media access to include critical analysis, evaluation, ethical content creation, and responsible participation. The results suggest that strengthening evaluative and analytical competencies may further improve students' overall media literacy.

3.2 Level of Critical Thinking Skills among Grade 12 HUMSS Students

3.2.1 Analysis

The respondents demonstrated a very high level of critical thinking in terms of analysis. They consistently identified main ideas and supporting details, distinguished facts from opinions, and analyzed arguments by recognizing claims, reasons, and evidence. These findings indicate strong analytical skills in processing and evaluating information. These findings are consistent with Ennis' (2011) view that critical thinking involves systematic analysis, evaluation, and reasoning. The results indicate that respondents are proficient in recognizing the components of arguments and extracting relevant information, reflecting well-developed analytical thinking skills.

3.2.2 Interpretation

The findings revealed a high level of critical thinking in interpretation. Respondents were able to understand and interpret information presented in graphs, charts, and tables, accurately summarize the main ideas of texts or discussions, and identify the intended message or purpose of different forms of communication. Although all indicators were rated highly, interpretation received a slightly lower rating than analysis. These findings support Facione's (1990) view that interpretation is a fundamental cognitive process for understanding meaning across language, data, and experiences. They also agree with Celce-Murcia & Olshtain (2000) and Enriquez (2018), who emphasized that strong interpretive competence contributes to effective communication and academic understanding.

3.2.3 Evaluation and Inference

Respondents exhibited a high level of evaluation and inference. They performed best in identifying bias, logical fallacies, and misleading information in media content, while drawing logical conclusions and making reasonable predictions based on available information were also rated highly. These findings indicate that respondents possess sound evaluative and inferential abilities despite slight variations among indicators. These findings are consistent with Ennis (2011), who identified evaluation and inference as essential elements of critical thinking, Halpern (2014), who emphasized assessing evidence and drawing reasoned conclusions, and Tiruneh et al. (2016), who concluded that structured instructional interventions significantly improve higher-order critical thinking skills.

3.2.4 Explanation

The respondents demonstrated a high level of explanation. They were generally able to explain their reasoning clearly, justify their decisions with logical arguments, and communicate their reasoning in both written and oral forms. Communicating reasoning received the lowest rating within the domain, although it remained at a high level. These findings align with Facione (1990), who described explanation as presenting conclusions and justifying reasoning coherently. They also support Swartz and Perkins (1990), Marin and Halpern (2011), and David and Dumanig (2011), who emphasized that effective explanation develops through reflective thinking and structured argumentation.

3.2.5 Self-Regulation

The findings showed a very high level of self-regulation, making it the highest-rated critical thinking domain. Respondents regularly reflected on their thinking, actively sought feedback to improve their reasoning, and consciously applied critical thinking strategies when solving problems. These results demonstrate strong metacognitive awareness and reflective thinking. These findings are consistent with Facione (1990), who identified self-regulation as the ability to monitor and

improve one's own thinking. They also support Flavell (1979), Pintrich (2002), and Boud (1995), who emphasized that reflective learning and self-regulation are essential for effective learning and academic achievement.

3.2.6 Overall Critical Thinking Skills

Overall, respondents demonstrated a high level of critical thinking skills. Analysis and self-regulation were the strongest domains, both receiving very high ratings, while interpretation, evaluation and inference, and explanation were all rated high. These findings indicate that respondents possess strong analytical and reflective thinking skills, although further enhancement of interpretation, evaluation, and explanation may strengthen their overall critical thinking. These findings are consistent with Facione's (1990) framework, which identifies analysis as a core component of critical thinking, and Hobbs' (2017), who emphasized that media analysis and evaluation activities strengthen critical thinking. The findings suggest that respondents are well prepared to analyze information critically while continuing to develop other higher-order reasoning skills.

3.3 Differences in Media Literacy and Critical Thinking Skills According to Respondents' Profile

3.3.1 Differences in the Level of Media Literacy According to Profile Variables

The findings showed no significant differences in the respondents' level of media literacy when grouped according to gender, voter registration status, type of media frequently used, purpose of media use, average daily media exposure, access to digital devices, internet availability at home, and internet availability in school. Since all obtained p-values were greater than the .05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was not rejected. These results indicate that respondents demonstrated comparable levels of media literacy regardless of their demographic characteristics, media-use patterns, or access to technology. These findings suggest that media literacy is not determined solely by demographic characteristics or access to digital resources but also involves the ability to analyze, evaluate, create, and engage with media critically and responsibly. The results are consistent with Potter (2010) and UNESCO (2013), who emphasized that media literacy extends beyond media access toward critical understanding and active engagement with media.

3.3.2 Differences in the Level of Critical Thinking Skills According to Profile Variables

The findings likewise revealed no statistically significant differences in the respondents' critical thinking skills based on gender, voter registration status, type of media frequently used, purpose of media use, average daily media exposure, access to digital devices, internet availability at home, and internet availability in school. All p-values exceeded the .05 level of significance, indicating that respondents exhibited similar levels of critical thinking regardless of their demographic and media-related characteristics. These findings indicate that demographic background, media exposure, and access to technology were not significantly associated with variations in critical thinking skills. The results support the theoretical perspectives of Ennis (2005) and Paul and Elder (2016), who argued that critical thinking develops through intentional instruction, reflective practice, and structured reasoning. Likewise, Facione (1990) emphasized that critical thinking is cultivated through systematic educational experiences rather than external factors. The findings also agree with Kirschner & De Bruyckere (2017; OECD, 2019), who noted that digital access alone does not necessarily improve higher-order thinking skills.

3.4 Relationship Between Media Literacy and Critical Thinking Skills

The findings revealed significant positive relationships between all dimensions of media literacy and the components of critical thinking skills. All correlations were statistically significant ($p < .05$), although their strengths varied across dimensions. Evaluation of media credibility and bias demonstrated the strongest positive associations with analysis, interpretation, evaluation and inference, explanation, and self-regulation. Participation and engagement also showed a strong relationship with evaluation and inference, while analysis of media messages was strongly associated with explanation. In contrast, access to media had the weakest, although still significant, relationships with the different components of critical thinking. These results indicate that stronger media literacy competencies are associated with higher levels of critical thinking skills, particularly in evaluating information, explaining reasoning, and regulating one's thinking. These findings support Potter (2010) and Livingstone (2018), who argued that media literacy extends beyond access to include critical analysis and evaluation. They are also consistent with Hobbs (2017) and Mihailidis and Thevenin (2013), who found that stronger media literacy enhances credibility assessment and informed decision-making. Similarly, Widarti et al. (2024) demonstrated that integrating digital and social media into learning activities significantly improves students' critical thinking skills. Furthermore, the results align with Facione's (1990) framework identifying analysis, interpretation, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation as essential components of critical thinking. Similar findings were reported by Fajardo (2023) and Widarti, Rokhim, and Ilviana (2024), who concluded that digital and social-media-integrated learning positively influences critical thinking. Overall, the findings suggest that strengthening media literacy through classroom instruction can enhance students' reasoning, evaluation, and responsible media engagement.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study found that Grade 12 HUMSS students demonstrated high levels of media literacy and critical thinking, with the highest competencies in media access, analytical thinking, and self-regulation, while evaluation, interpretation, and critical assessment were comparatively lower. Media literacy and critical thinking did not significantly differ across the respondents' demographic and media-use characteristics. Moreover, the significant positive relationship between media literacy and critical thinking indicates that students with stronger media literacy also tend to exhibit higher levels of critical thinking, underscoring the importance of integrating media literacy into instruction to enhance students' analytical, evaluative, and responsible engagement with digital media.

Schools are encouraged to systematically integrate media literacy and critical thinking into classroom instruction through curriculum enhancement and learning activities such as fact-checking, media analysis, guided discussions, debates, research tasks, and reflective exercises. These approaches may strengthen students' ability to evaluate information, navigate algorithm-driven technologies and artificial intelligence, and promote responsible media engagement. Future researchers are encouraged to replicate the study using larger, multi-institutional samples and examine additional variables, including academic performance, teaching strategies, and digital learning experiences, to further explore the relationship between media literacy and critical thinking.

This study was limited to Grade 12 HUMSS students from a single institution with a relatively small sample, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. The use of self-reported responses may also reflect differences in respondents' interpretation of the survey items. Despite these limitations, the study contributes to the existing literature by examining multiple domains of media literacy and critical thinking and provides insights that may support curriculum enhancement, instructional planning, and future research.

Compliance with ethical standards

The authors conducted this study in accordance with ethical research principles. All participants were informed of the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits, and their rights prior to participation. Participation was voluntary, and respondents' anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the study in compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012.

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