

# **Critical media literacy among International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme graduates**

Master's thesis

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The amount of media is increasing and expanding, and various media and technology literacy skills can be essential in the global and technological societies. It is easier to access media with improved information and communication technologies, and many societies require a constant use of media for completing general tasks and chores. Despite of this increasing media consumption, the system does not necessarily demand a media critical outlook from their citizens. School curriculums require classes to include more extensive media and technology education but the practical and critical implementation is often up to the individual initiative of the teacher and the educational environment. This thesis explores how International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) graduates learned critical media literacy during the programme and how the concept benefited them after their graduation in further education and life in general. Using the qualitative thematic interview methods, this thesis analysed the experiences of ten IBDP graduates who graduated from Lyseonpuiston lukio in Rovaniemi, Finland and continued to further academic education. The participants thought there is a need for critical media literacy in the current society and the educational curriculums should reflect this need as well. Teachers should use practical examples from the popular media and the surrounding culture when educating their students how to use critical media literacy in their studies and free time.

**Keywords:** **critical media literacy, International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme, critical thinking, global citizenship, university students**

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# 1 Introduction

Some journalists, scholars and educators have argued there is a greater need for critical media literacy and a general critical mind-set in the current society due to increasing amount and variety of media, technologies and information (Tisdell, 2008, 48; Ivanovic, 2014, 439). Ranieri and Fabbro (2016, 463) stated the populism is increasing in the local and global media and people have less trust in the authorities. Different social media platforms are occasionally responsible for spreading false information, which can have drastic consequences on the individual and societies (Hogan and Safi, 2018). The terms ‘fake news’ and ‘alternative facts’ have gained more popularity after the presidential campaign and election of Donald Trump and other political and presidential elections of various European countries (Saraste, 2017; Valtanen, 2018, 20). Some blame the social media platform Facebook for being partially responsible for the massacre of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar as Facebook enabled the spread of fake news in the area (Hogan and Safi, 2018). There are increasing amount of news articles on media criticism and literacy and even the current Pope has said spreading and writing fake news equals to “being sexually aroused by excrement” (Griffin, 2016, para 1).

This master’s thesis investigated how the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) uses the concept of critical media literacy in the programme and how the concept and the IBDP prepare students for the further academic education and life in general. The thesis was interested in the IBDP student experiences and attitudes how the school prepared the student for the university. For example, I evaluated if the IBDP taught students to write academic essays, think in a critical manner and use appropriate sources and referencing style in their assignments (Culross and Tarver, 2011, 236; Wilkinson and Hayden, 2010, 90). I related these research interests to the concept of critical media literacy as they share similar objectives and ideals with the IBDP such as questioning and criticising the authority, hegemony, narrative and author (Kupiainen and Sintonen, 2009, 59; Kendall and McDougall, 2012, 25). As of writing this thesis, I found only one article, which researched the relationship of IBDP and critical media literacy but this study concentrated on the IBDP teacher experiences

(Harshman, 2018). There are also limited amount of studies about the IBDP in Finland. I conducted qualitative interviews with the IBDP graduates of Lyseonpuiston lukio and I compared their experiences with previous studies for gaining an understanding whether my participants experiences agreed with their results. The researchers should not use this thesis for generalising the presented ideas as the present study requests future researchers should continue studying IBDP, media education and critical media literacy concepts together in Finland.

## **2 Theoretical framework and literature review of the previous research**

The research discussed and investigated the IBDP in the Lyseonpuiston lukio in Rovaniemi. In this section, I define the concept of critical media literacy and illustrate its relation to IBDP and possible educational success. The second part of the first section introduces studies, which have discussed the necessity of critical media literacy in education. There are studies which have been conducted in various countries as they give idea how critical media literacy education is accessible in diverse cultures.

Later in the chapter, I define and describe the IBDP, the International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO) and their relevance in the present study. The second part of the second section presents previous research, which have investigated the experiences of IBDB by current students or programme graduates. Some studies discuss the programme, while others concentrate on various aspects of IBDP.

### **2.1 Critical media literacy**

This thesis will implement the ideas of the critical media literacy to this research. Critical media literacy is a concept where the media texts and messages are critically and thoroughly analysed and related to the surrounding social norms and values (Aarsand and Melander, 2016, 20). There is also another similar concept called critical media pedagogy but the present research does not concentrate on this pedagogical concept. However, critical media literacy and pedagogy share many similarities with the objectives of the IBO as they want to create critical and global citizens who question the underlying power structures and hegemonies (Taylor and Porath, 2006, 150; Hammer, 2011, 358; Kendall and McDougall, 2012, 25). Hence, the present research requests future research should investigate how critical media pedagogy is visible in the IBDP and how does it affect academic success in further education.

Before we can fully understand the idea of critical media literacy, the thesis will fully explain and define each word of the concept. According to Vesterinen (2011, 1), when concepts consist of multiple words, the first words delimit the last word of the concept. In the case of critical media literacy, researchers and educators concentrate on literacy but they narrow it down to explore a specific type of literacy. Researchers can define literacy as the actual ability to read and understand the given texts (Kupiainen and Sintonen, 2009, 37). In education, students with suitable literacy skills can read, assess, analyse and evaluate the chosen written sources (Robertson and Hughes, 2011, 40; Cetin and Demiral, 2012, 154; Sebryuk, 2017, 694). Some researchers and educators say citizens cannot actively participate in their societies without literacy skills, as many legal and governmental documents and forms require the ability to read (Ranieri and Fabbro, 2016, 463). Education is essential for literacy as rates of literacy are highest in countries where education is free and everyone has an equal access to it (Tanriverdi and Apak, 2010, 1189). Buckingham (1994, 5) stated the literacy should not only refer to the instrumental or cognitive skills of actual reading, as the concept of literacy should discuss the social relationship with the wider cultural context.

Media may refer to any devices, forms or medium where people can publish and project their ideas (Herkman, 2007, 39; Kline, 2016, 650). Some of these forms and mediums may include “print, film, television, radio, multimedia, the Internet and digital games (Tanriverdi and Apak, 2010, 1190). The actual act of publishing information can be controlled but the medium and forms are globally similar in technologically advanced nations and cultures (Tanriverdi and Apak, 2010, 1208; Sebryuk, 2017, 695).

The term critical refers to the way media is analysed; the components of the media should be questioned and properly analysed and the reader should be aware of any power structures or hegemonies which could influence the media (Herkman, 2007, 15; Kupiainen and Sintonen, 2009, 59). According to Kupiainen and Sintonen (2009, 60), the term criticality expects the reader to understand the offered norms and ideas from the very root and core of the idea. Being critical does not equal to being negative, but it refers to the attitude, how the target is approached (Kupiainen and Sintonen, 2009, 58). Vesterinen

concluded critical media literacy could refer to “the competence, knowledge and skills needed to use and interpret different media and to produce content and take pleasure in various media” (Vesterinen, 2011, 16). Hence, critical media literacy is closely linked with critical thinking, as the former cannot properly exist without the latter and vice versa (Hammer, 2011, 361). Critical thinking and critical media literacy skills are often mandatory for succeeding in the university environment (Cole, Ullman, Gannon and Rooney, 2015, 247) and these concepts are occasionally called the skills of the 21st century because of the increasing need for technology and media in the current society (Morrell, 2014, 5; Sagun, Ateskan and Onur, 2015, 440; Kesler, Tinio and Nolan, 2016, 2).

Altogether, critical media literacy is a skill where the reader is capable of understanding and analysing different messages in various media platforms. The reader should be aware there could be a lack of diversity as the global hegemonies can homogenise the media imageries (Meehan, Ray, Wells and Schwarz, 2015, 83). The reader must understand how these messages are constructed and whether they are based on the present and prevalent social constructs and norms (Tisdell, 2008, 50; Kupiainen and Sintonen, 2009, 60; Puchner, Markowitz and Hedley, 2017, 25). According to the IBO, the concept of critical thinking asserts critical thinkers should “become aware of their own perspectives and those of the various groups whose knowledge they share” (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2014, 1). The individual should understand their values stem from a certain cultural or social context and there is a process of knowing, which should be understood for comprehending critical thinking (Sagun et al, 2015, 451; Kupiainen and Sintonen, 2009, 59). It is more important for the student to understand how knowledge process operates than for the student to gather more knowledge as all the knowledge should be open to criticism and analysis (Cole et al, 2015, 248; Vesterinen, 2011, 39).

The concept of critical media literacy is multidisciplinary and the concept is closely related to the various theories of the cultural studies (Garcia, Seglem and Share, 2013, 110) and some researchers say the concept has evolved from feminist and Marxist theories (Tisdell, 2008, 51; Kim, 2017, 199). Kendall and McDougall (2012, 27), Kellner and Share (2007, 59) and Garcia et al (2013, 111) asserted how critical media literacy aims to

educate students to understand how media and the media content are created and how there is an intended message behind any published content. Critical media literacy is closely linked with different theories such as various sociological concepts (Daniels, 2012, 21), hegemonies (Gainer, 2010, 366; Joanou, 2017, 41), critical pedagogy (Tisdell, 2008, 64) and the Frankfurt school (Herkman, 2007, 16; Mason, 2016, 81). In the recent years, many researchers have based their understanding of the concept on the academic Douglas Kellner as his work has been influential in the critical media literacy field (Gainer et al, 2009, 675; Choudhury and Share, 2012, 39). There are also other similar concepts such as digital media literacy, which concentrates more on the actual ICT and internet use and this concept uses very similar methods to critical media literacy (Tang and Chaw, 2016, 54). For example, students should be able to possess appropriate and relevant skills for accessing, comprehending and generating media content using different forms of digital media (Park, Kim and Na, 2015, 833). Some researchers could say digital media literacy stems from the critical media literacy as the former concept teaches how to access and acquire applicable skills for “the right information management and critical thinking skills, as well as proper online behaviours” (Tang and Chaw, 2016, 54).

One of the main factors of critical media literacy is “meaning making” (Kendall and McDougall, 2012, 27); the reader should be able to discover the purpose of different media messages and relate them to their individual agency and their social environment (Kendall and McDougall, 2012, 27). In addition, students, who have grasp the idea of critical media literacy, should be able to understand and analyse how the powerful hegemonies affect and control the media messages and information and what kind of an effect this will have on the audience (Kellner and Share, 2007, 60; Gainer, 2010, 364-365). If the reader understands the underlying power structures and meaning making such as how media is created, what is the purpose of certain media images or texts, who is its audience and why certain imagery is used for chosen media, they can possess proficient skills for critical media literacy (Rodesiler, 2010, 166; Kendall and McDougall, 2012, 25; Meehan et al, 2015, 83). Many researchers have stated there is a need for critical media literacy practices as educators often teach their students to analyse the media in the simplest manner without properly evaluating the constructions and structures behind the media and societies (Buckingham, 1994, 6; Kellner and Share, 2007, 62; Kupiainen and

Sintonen, 2009, 10; Choudhury and Share, 2012, 39-40). Hammer (2011, 357) highlighted how educators have an important role and responsibility for teaching the ideal skills of critical media literacy and critical thinking to their students as these pedagogical methods would create citizens who are active and conscious of their media consumption. Empowerment of the students is one of the main justifications for including critical media literacy in the education as the reader learns to question and challenge the problematic traditions and norms and differentiate propaganda from the media (Herkman, 2007, 32; Akar-Vural, 2010, 742; Choudhury and Share, 2012, 43; Kesler et al, 2016, 23; Kim, 2017, 200; Sebryuk, 2017, 697).

The current society is evolving around the emerging technologies and the education should reflect these changes (Ivanovic, 2014, 439; Joanou, 2017, 41). Hence, critical media literacy discusses and analyses the emergence of new technologies and the possible effect they can have on the society and the global world (Garcia et al, 2013, 120). The critical media assignments require students to “assess the authenticity, reliability, relevance, and bias of the messages as well as the different medium” (Garcia et al, 2013, 115). Critical media literacy also educates readers about social realities (Kellner and Share, 2007, 62) which can teach information about the global realities of different societies and how different people and groups can experience and understand different media messages (Kupiainen and Sintonen, 2009, 126-127). For example, people can understand the underlying social structures such as visible and invisible forms of racism, sexism and other forms of bigotry (Joanou, 2017, 44-45) if they critically analyse and understand the media (Herkman, 2007, 46). Thus, some critical media educators and researchers would reform the education, as it should implement the objectives and ideas of the critical media literacy (Buckingham, 1994; Hammer, 2011; Joanou, 2017, 41). The reform is also important as these negative images and messages can be extremely harmful against different social groups, especially when they are socially normalised and unquestioned in the global societies (Joanou, 2017, 41). In addition, critical media literacy teaches people how to verify the reliability of the presented knowledge (Vesterinen, 2011, 14) and this skill should be part of all teaching in all the educational levels. The students should be able to look for critical, academic and peer-reviewed knowledge and they

should notice when the presented information consists of intentional deceit and ‘alternative facts’ (Kupiainen and Sintonen, 2009, 14; Vesterinen, 2011, 20).

However, critical media literacy is not common in the education and pedagogy, for example due to lack of resources, teacher training or socio-political situation, where media is highly controlled by the government (Hammer, 2011, 361). The educators and scholars should remember that learning and education is situated in the cultural and social context (Aarsand and Melander, 2016, 22). It can be difficult to expect same standards from every student around the world, especially as the learning should also happen outside of the educational context and some students and schools may have access to better resources and equipment. Furthermore, Kellner and Share (2007, 59) noted it is impossible for the student to learn the critical media literacy skills as there can be no offered courses to learn it in the United States. The situation is similar in Finland as well according to Vesterinen (2011, 5) and Rantala (2011, 125). There can be a prominent hierarchical system in the national education, which can adhere the critical thinking and debates. Some students cannot question their teachers as the society may portray teachers as the strict authority (Gainer, 2010, 371). Education is often used as a political tool for gaining more power for different politicians and their parties and in various cultures and nations, critical media literacy can be dangerous for leaders who wish to maintain their power (Kellner and Share, 2007, 68; Vesterinen, 2011, 28; Joanou, 2017, 44). The powerful figures and leaders wish to maintain the traditional hegemony for securing their powerful status (Joanou, 2017, 41). In addition, critical thinking skills and further critical media literacy skills are dependent on the individual teacher’s pedagogical philosophies and models and hence, “teacher training and pedagogy have a significant impact on students’ critical thinking outcomes” (Cole et al, 2015, 250). Even in the current classroom settings, many educators use the traditional pedagogical models which are teacher-centred and mainly consist of the “walk and chalk” (Daniels, 2012, 6) approach where the teacher stands in front of the class whilst rest of the class remains silent. Critical media literacy and thinking concepts have not received enough attention in the past from pedagogy educators and many of the current teachers do not possess the applicable skills for teaching critical media literacy nor critical thinking. Some researchers have stated the situation is even worse in countries, where the freedom of speech and media are controlled

(Tanriverdi and Apak, 2010, 1204; Sebryuk, 2017, 694). The lack of critical media literacy education can have a negative effect on the students as well. The concept can be fundamental inside and outside of the educational environment (Herkman, 2007, 32), especially as the lack of critical outlook can exclude some people from the society by diminishing their feeling of empowerment (Cole et al, 2015, 250; Puchner et al, 2017, 26). If the future educators wish to change this situation, media education classes are necessary as they can consist of various media analysis concepts such as critical media literacy and media education with critical media literacy can help students and educators understand the social constructs and their effect on each other (Vesterinen, 2011, 16; Puchner et al, 2017, 25).

The IBDP can offer a change to the general high school system as the classes are closer to university classes where teacher can provide a topic for classroom discussion and the students can question their teachers with critical proof (Alford, Rollins, Stillisano and Waxman, 2013, 12). In addition, the IBDP assignments require students to implement many of the ideas of the critical media literacy if the students wish to gain the maximum scores. The IBDP students need to question purpose, origin and the intended audience of the chosen sources (Hill, 2011, 29; Hill, 2012, 354; Taylor and Porath, 2006, 154). The IBO is not tightly tied to any country or culture and hence, the organisation aims to limit any certain political agenda. For example, IBDP requires the students to study their own native languages by reading the national literature as the organisation supports different cultures and their linguistic differences (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2014). Hence, this research could provide valuable insight if these ideas are present in the IBDP as this type of learning environment can provide a unique experience compared to the learning environment of the national high schools (Kellner and Share, 2007, 63).

### **2.1.1 Criticism on critical media literacy**

Some researchers have criticised the concept for its narrow ideas and definitions (Kline, 2016; Mason, 2016). According to Kline (2016, 654), critical media literacy has a negative relationship with media where critical media literacy theorists have very bleak

view of media. This argument can be an oversimplification as the concept criticises the notable hegemonies and stereotypes used in the media but it does not see the media itself as inherently evil. Some critical media literacy scholars argue different media forms can be empowering and cause discussion and even changes in the society as they may dismantle the norms and taboos (Herkman, 2007, 32; Tisdell, 2008, 49; Kupiainen and Sintonen, 2009, 127). Tisdell (2008, 50) also continued critical media literacy classes should not concentrate on critique, as the students should analyse the creativity of the media as well. Mason (2016, 91) criticised critical media literacy educators concentrating too much on the message whilst neglecting the importance of the medium. Kline also agrees with this because in his opinion, critical media literacy does not properly analyse “telemorphosis” (Kline, 2016, 642) which states different mediums have become scattered and altered in the current society. Critical media literacy also assumes the audience must be active but Kline (2016, 651) continued there is no longer clear dichotomy between the viewer and the viewed. He argued the audience has become isolated in their personal connection to the technologies and mediums. However, many critical media literacy educators consider the changing role of the medium in their analysis such as why was the media published as a commercial in the online platform rather than an advert in the newspaper (Alvermann and Hagood, 2000, 193; Akar-Vural, 2010, 741; Rodesiler, 2010, 164). In addition, Kline (2016, 654-655) and Mason (2016, 80) mainly based their arguments on Douglas Kellner’s research from the early 2000s, and critical media literacy scholars have moved forward by further developing the concept by Kellner to be more inclusive and analytical. For example, many critical media literacy theorists and educators suggest teaching the concept alongside with other relevant concepts and activities such as meaning-making (Puchner et al, 2017, 25; Harshman, 2018, 109), content production (Kupiainen and Sintonen, 2009, 141; Sebryuk, 2017, 698-699) and journalism ethics (Clark, 2013, 886). Mason (2016, 94) still agreed critical media literacy education should exist but the concept alone is too narrow and the classes should consist of various other concepts such as McLuhan’s famous idea how “medium is the message” (Mason, 2016, 91). Some critical media literacy scholars have also stated teachers should not teach the concept as a stand-alone subject but it should be accompanied in every subject from mathematics and sciences to literature classes and social sciences (Tanriverdi and Apak, 2010, 1187).

### **2.1.2 Studies on critical media literacy**

Joanou argued research on critical media literacy is essential as it “helps bridge the gap between theory and practice” (Joanou, 2017, 40). In addition, Rantala (2011, 124) and Ivanovic (2014, 439) acknowledged media literacy is necessary especially amongst the youngest generations as they have had access to the advanced technology and media in the early childhood and hence, they require training on safer media (Robertson and Hughes, 2011, 51; Morrell, 2014, 5). These changes are highly essential as media, technology can be a necessity in the current societies, and they influence everyone in the public and private realms (Ivanovic, 2014, 440). The internet can be accessed from various mediums and it is faster and simpler compared to the past (Harshman, 2018, 107). For example, Finnish children have their first contact with media and technology when they are less than one year old and the rate of media and technology use constantly increases when children enter the first year of their schools (Rantala, 2011, 124). Hence, Rantala created “The Media Muffin Project” (Rantala, 2011, 126) as it aimed to “improve the media education awareness in early childhood education and [...] the first grades of primary school” (Rantala, 2011, 126). Researchers created various studies about this programme and found out training for the media literacy is necessary for wider understanding of the concept. The results of various studies have indicated the concept of critical media literacy should be taught and practiced in as early as possible to create a safe and comfortable environment where the children can consume media and use technology (Diergarten, Möckel, Nieding and Ohler, 2017, 39). The Media Muffin project offered sessions and courses where the researchers trained various educators about the basics of safe media use and how they could implement the new information in their teaching methods (Rantala, 2011, 126). The researcher conducted the training sessions in Finland with almost three thousand Finnish teachers and the research used various methods for analysing its research interests. The researchers found out critical media literacy require extensive training as general package information and few necessary courses were not enough for teachers to understand the importance of these concepts in their own teaching and pedagogical models. Critical media literacy can be very recent concept for most of the teachers and hence, they might not possess the rightful skills or thinking styles for adopting the concept in their work (Robertson and Hughes, 2011, 48).

Furthermore, if teachers cannot understand the importance of critical media literacy, they will compromise the media reading skills of their students as well (Gainer, 2010, 371; Rantala, 2011, 126).

Tanriverdi and Apak emphasised critical media literacy is necessary “for a healthy democracy” (Tanriverdi and Apak, 2010, 1189). Their research found differences between critical media literacy education in Turkey, Finland and Ireland, which could be linked to state of the country, its democracy and freedom of the press. The researchers studied the curricula of these chosen countries and they looked for statements of media education and media literacy. For instance, the curricula of Ireland stated students should obtain the skills to find appropriate sources and evaluate the influential power media can have on the opinions and values of the consumer (Tanriverdi and Apak, 2010, 1204). Finland had even more advanced ideas how to include the media literacy in the classroom as the students should have skills to reflect, understand and criticise the provided media messages and they should use these skills to empower themselves and other people around them. Even though, Finnish media educators have asserted media education and critical media literacy are insufficient in the Finnish education system (Kupiainen and Sintonen, 2009, 28; Vesterinen, 2011, 21; Rantala, 2011, 126), the situation is relatively better compared to Turkey and Ireland. In comparison, Turkish curriculum did not have any statements or objectives about critical media literacy. The research results indicated media literacy education should be present in all the classes of education and hence, the schools should not teach it as “a stand-alone subject” (Tanriverdi and Apak, 2010, 1187) in primary education but this also applies to all the levels of education as critical media literacy is always essential. In the research by Diergarten et al (2017, 33), the researchers argued there should be critical media literacy education in the kindergarten because even toddlers can partially understand what they see in the television and young children can recognise different symbols used in the media. Many studies have also noted critical media literacy and media education should have student-centred approach as the students should learn to read and analyse different media text and images themselves (Gainer, Valdez-Gainer and Kinard, 2009, 675; Gainer, 2010, 372; Robertson and Hughes, 2011, 51; Morrell, 2014, 6). The methods should not exclusively concentrate on protecting the children from harmful media images as critical media literacy should highlight the

interconnectedness of the global world (Tanriverdi and Apak, 2010, 1188; Ranieri and Fabbro, 2016, 473). In overall, Finland and Ireland gained very similar results in the analysis, but researchers noted Finland was slightly more liberal and critical about media literacy. Turkey was criticised for having very protectionist view, where the Turkish education system taught the young students to avoid certain negative media messages without providing the students insight what these media messages signify and what is their purpose in the social context (Tanriverdi and Apak, 2010, 1209). Researchers have stated there is a need for critical media literacy but it is not correctly implemented or it does not even exist in the educational systems of all levels from primary schools to universities (Diergarten et al, 2017, 39). The democratic state of the country can affect the state of the critical media literacy education. Hence, Tanriverdi and Apak noted Turkey was behind the implementation as Turkish curricula was less “focused on developing skills, attitude, and values with the idea of provision and participation as it is in the curricula of Finland and Ireland” (Tanriverdi and Apak, 2010, 1209). Some might explain these differences by the socio-political and cultural situations of these countries. However, the study should be criticised for these conclusions as the national curricula and its aims might not be present in the practice; even though the Finnish curriculum demands critical media literacy practices, for example, the teachers might not have the rightful skills for implementing the concept in their work (Rantala, 2011, 127; Vesterinen, 2011, 33).

There were similar results in Russia compared to the situation of Turkey and these educational conditions can be explained by similarities in the political, social and cultural situations of Turkey and Russia (Fedorov and Levitskaya, 2016; Tanriverdi and Apak, 2010; Sebryuk, 2017). Fedorov and Levitskaya (2016) analysed two different Russian universities and conducted quantitative surveys, which administered to the students of the chosen universities. The researchers chose quantitative multiple-choice questionnaires, as they believed the media literacy concept could be too complex for some students and the researchers decided to provide questionnaires with multiple-choice questions where the participants could choose the ideal answer. The questionnaires asked participants about their media use and the level of their media competencies. Fedorov and Levitskaya (2016, 213) concluded their results indicate the Russian university-level students have

incompetent skills to evaluate and understand the media and its messages. Therefore, Fedorov and Levitskaya (2016, 215) highlighted the need for the university students to understand the concept of critical media literacy and hence, they should apply to courses, which would teach them these skills for improving their learning experiences.

Several researchers have requested the educational system requires a major change and the researcher discussed critical media literacy and critical thinking could be taught with the use of popular culture (Alvermann and Hagood, 2000, 197; Daniels, 2012, 6). Many current generation students are more familiar with media and they prefer consuming technological content of television and internet to the traditional books and newspapers. Daniels (2012) conducted a study on social science classes in the chosen university in the United States, where the researcher showed documentaries to the participating group of social science students and afterwards asked the students to create reports on the documentaries. Researcher chose documentaries as they benefit the visual learning style and Daniels (2012, 6) argued this could be a more common learning style in the current day as many students are more familiar with visual media and understand visual cues better compared to written texts. For example, she stated the Internet has a great influence on how the current generation students understand and retain information and knowledge (Daniels, 2012, 9). Daniels (2012, 15) found out documentaries helped students to comprehend different concepts of sociology and cultural theory such as dominant power structures in a more practical and straightforward manner. In other similar studies, some students could understand their privileged social positions through media such as how their gender, race and ethnicity helped them gain a certain status in their social environment (Tisdell, 2008, 50-51; Gainer, 2010, 372). Hence, the researcher concluded the educators should use documentaries when teaching about critical media literacy as it “can be an effective method for engaging students” (Daniels, 2012, 21) in the understanding of the chosen media messages. Joanou also agreed with this notion as “visual imagery and popular media help students grapple with theoretically dense concepts” (Joanou, 2017, 40). Her study concentrated on several sociological and cultural theories and critical pedagogy methods. The study researched how practicing teacher students understand and experience these concepts and her study helped the participating students to notice their possibly privileged status in their own societies. The teacher

student participants and the researcher noticed critical media literacy skills are essential in the educational world as the teachers have the important role to challenge harmful ideologies and normative oppressions (Joanou, 2017, 45). The research results concluded people concretise and conceptualise the critical media literacy theory if the media is deconstructed into smaller terms and definitions as the students can link the theory to more practical terms, which they could relate to their own lives and experiences (Joanou, 2017, 45). Other researchers have used similar methods where they teach the concept of critical media literacy to the students with practical examples from the popular culture. For example, some research articles used advertisement (Gainer et al, 2009; Rodesiler, 2010; Choudhury and Share, 2012), television shows (Akar-Vural, 2010; Hant, 2010), films (Gainer, 2010), websites (Kesler et al, 2016) or children's stories (Alvermann and Hagood, 2000; Kim, 2017) to discuss their use of stereotypes and hegemonies. Others discussed how advertisement relied on specific tropes to gain the attention of the intended audience (Rodesiler, 2010, 164). Many agreed this is the best way to learn the concept as it concretises the problems of the media and relates them to the global context (Tisdell, 2008, 60; Rodesiler, 2010; Puchner et al, 2017, 25). This method can be also more interesting as some researchers said political or historical primary sources can be too abstract for some students and they cannot easily relate them to their own experiences compared to the modern popular culture examples (Ranieri and Fabbro, 2016, 471). It can be easier to empower the students with more relatable examples and teach them about the underlying privileges and social expectations such as beauty standards and sexual identities (Herkman, 2007, 39; Akar-Vural, 2010, 751; Gainer, 2010, 371; Clark, 2013, 887; Morrell, 2014, 6).

Park et al (2015) conducted another study on critical media literacy using quantitative methods where they designed surveys to collect their data from South Korean adolescents. Their main research interests investigated how the internet use affects the relationships and socialisation of the younger generation (Park et al, 2015, 834). The research concentrated on digital media literacy, which is related to the ability to critically understand and produce any messages or contents and the possibility to participate in various activities in the internet. Digital literacy can be an essential part of critical media literacy as the latter concept does not necessarily concentrate on the actual ICT

(information and communication technology) use but the concept is very interested in the online media content and how ICT is used for spreading different media messages such as advertising (Kupiainen and Sintonen, 2009, 124). Park et al (2015, 844) found out the participants with better digital literacy and critical media literacy skills can expand their social networks as they can connect with more diverse groups. These results indicate digital literacy and critical media literacy are useful skills outside of the educational environment. However, the researchers could not conclude whether these factors had a causal or correlational relationship.

This study conducts qualitative research as it gives insight to the experiences of the students. However, critical media literacy also requires quantitative research for better generalisations, which could help education professionals around the world for implementing the critical media literacy in the most effective manner (Joanou, 2017, 41). For the quantitative research, future researchers should also construct a cohesive research apparatus for this field as previous research articles used various methods and methodologies. Previous researchers such as Alvermann and Hagood (2000, 203), Rantala (2011, 130) and Kupiainen and Sintonen (2009, 179) have recommended future research to study all levels of education. Critical media literacy skills should gain more research as it would benefit the students and the teachers in their educational setting and personal lives. This thesis investigates how the IBDP graduates understand critical media literacy as there is little research, which has investigated the relationship between the IBDP and the critical media literacy.

## **2.2 The International Baccalaureate Organisation and the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme**

The IBDP and the IBO were founded in 1968 in Geneva (Hill, 2011, 27; Alford et al, 2013, 1). Prior to 1968, educators were wishing for an educational programme, which would create critical world citizens and educate its students about international affairs from different perspectives (Lineham, 2013, 260; Hallinger, Lee and Walker, 2011, 125). Teachers deemed it necessary to educate students who would not be afraid to criticise the

norms and evaluate different opinions (Hill, 2011, 27; Wells, 2011, 175-176; Alford et al, 2013, 2). In addition, the globalising world needed a programme which would be universally valued and recognised for alleviating the application processes to global universities (Hill, 2011, 28) and in the current day, the IBDP graduates can easily apply to any university which acknowledges the universality of the IBDP certificate (Wells, 2011, 175; Wilkinson and Hayden, 2010, 91). The IBDP is a two-year programme (Tarc and Beatty, 2012, 344) but in many countries, such as Finland and Turkey (Cetin and Demiral, 2012), it lasts three years. The first year is called the preliminary year (pre-IB) which familiarises the future IBDP students with the pedagogical and learning methods as there can be a learning curve to the IBDP. The popularity of the IBDP has been growing since the implementation and in the recent decades, there has been greater increase in the IBDP schools (Bunnell, 2011, 66; Hallinger et al, 2011, 125). The largest amount of IBDP schools are in the United States, Canada and Western Europe but the programme has been gaining popularity in other parts of the world as well (Hill, 2012, 344). The IBO also offers primary years programme (PYP) and middle years programme (MYP) but compared to the IBDP, these programmes are not as popular (Lineham, 2013, 261). There is also a new alternative to the IBDP which is called 'the Career-related Programme' and it originates from a Finnish project which was launched in 2014 (International Baccalaureate, 2014). As of writing this research, the new programme does not exist in Finland, but it compares to the dichotomy between the Finnish national high school and the Finnish vocational school.

If the school wishes to establish the IBDP in their respective schools, the school and the hypothetical IBDP teachers need to go through extensive training, which is authorised by the IBO. The teachers must take various courses and lectures on the IB philosophy and the organisation arranges visits to the school sites for ensuring the quality of the IBDP (Alford et al, 2013, 2). The IBDP inspectors independently grade the IBDP student according to the IBDP criteria and they do not compare the students to each other (Sagun et al, 2015, 441). Hence hypothetically speaking, every IBDP student could receive the highest grades and this type of grading is closer to the university practices where students are often graded independently without any comparisons between the grades (Cetin and Demiral, 2012, 159). The IBDP students choose six or seven subjects from different

groups and three of these subjects must be studied in the higher level (HL) and the rest of the studies are studied in standard level (SL) (Saavedra, Lavore and Flores-Ivich, 2016, 347) (See Appendix 5). In Finland, Finnish native speakers choose Finnish as their first language and English as second. In Lyseonpuiston lukio, there is no option for ‘the arts’ and students choose either a third language (Swedish), another classical science (chemistry, biology and physics) or another social science (economics, history and psychology) (Lyseonpuiston lukio, 2018). If the student does not want to study social sciences, it is also possible to concentrate on classical sciences but one classical science is always mandatory. HL is more difficult compared to SL and students need to create more assignments in their HL subjects (Donahue et al, 2016, 64). This method of studying is noted to provide more in-depth understanding of fewer subjects, which can be a benefit for a student who is aware of their interests.

There are several objectives of the IBDP; the organisation wishes the students would have the skills to study the world without hastily generalising ideas in the end of the programme (Lineham, 2013, 265; Wells, 2011, 179; Alford et al, 2013, 2; Hill, 2012, 355). In addition, the students must remain critical about the media as media can never be completely objective (Wilkinson and Hayden, 2010, 91; Tarc and Beatty, 2012, 344). The IBDP students should develop their critical and analytical skills to be able to consider all the opinions which can contradict and oppose each other and teachers should teach this type of skill by using pedagogical and learning models based on constructivism and socio-constructivism (Choudhury and Share, 2012, 41; Lineham, 2013, 274; Puchner et al, 2017, 23). The IBDP also uses similar class structures to universities as IB teachers expect their class to be able to prepare critical and constructive debates around the chosen topic. This type of teaching helps the students to develop critical thinking skills, where they should not give any statements without concrete and reliable proof (Lineham, 2013, 266). The learning profile of the IBDP expects students to aim to be “knowledgeable, thinkers, communicators, principled, open-minded [...] and reflexive” (Wells, 2011, 177). These traits are very closely linked with the concept of critical media literacy, as it requires people to remain open but also constructive about the offered information (Clark, 2013, 889; Garcia et al, 2013, 110). For example, Wells (2011, 174) stated the IBDP student must always remain critical so they will understand what values are visible and promoted

in the dialogue. The IBDP does not literally mention the support for the idea of critical media literacy in its curriculum but the programme discusses all the important aspects of the critical media literacy. Similarly, to critical media literacy, the IBDP is “multi-disciplinary” (Alford et al, 2013, 3) as the students should be able to discuss how different disciplines affect their analysis after completing the programme (Alford et al, 2013, 3).

The IBDP aims to teach students to be global, critical and understanding citizens (Bunnell, 2011, 72; Kim, 2011, 253; Tarc and Beatty, 2012, 353) but there can be problems with implementing these ideas in practice due to lack of resources and material and the individual differences of the teacher and the students. The IBDP also aims to prepare the students for the university life and promotes “life-long learning” (Wells, 2011, 175) but there can be differing results, as the students might not value the learning after completing the programme. Hence, this study intends to investigate whether these statements and objectives apply according to the opinions of the students. This present research is particularly interested in how IBDP objectives are related to critical media literacy and how the concept is significant in further education and in the real life, in general ideas benefit the student when they continue their studies in the university. For example, other studies have related thinking styles to “academic success and real-world performance” (Kim, 2011, 252) and critical thinking and media literacy can have useful benefits in the university environment (Alvermann and Hagood, 2000, 201; Meehan et al, 2015, 82). For example, Kim (2011, 253) noted one of the main objectives of IBDP was to create a more critical and advanced learning environment for highly achieving students.

### **2.2.1 Theory of knowledge**

The Theory of Knowledge (TOK) course is one of the compulsory courses for each IBDP student. The course teaches critical thinking and source analysis and it compiles the philosophical objectives of the IBDP into one course (Hill, 2012, 347). TOK course teaches critical thinking as a stand-alone subject but the course demands the students to use these skills in all the other IB subjects as well (Tarc and Beatty, 2012, 345). TOK offers the real essence of the IB philosophy as the course lectures the students to remain

critical about their surrounding world and taking all the perspectives and discourses into consideration without making conclusions about different topics and statements (Wilkinson and Hayden, 2010, 93). Furthermore, TOK offers students the introduction to logic and logical problems, which can provoke the student to consider the common issues with knowledge, and how knowledge is constructed (Cole et al, 2015, 248). IBDP students learn the different ways of implementing knowing and knowledge in their other classes (Tarc and Beatty, 2012, 361).

Some critical media literacy educators have stated educators cannot teach the concept in one separate course, as it should be required in all the courses in the school programme (Cole et al, 2015, 260). For example, Cole et al questioned if the best way to teach critical thinking is through “an epistemological course” (Cole et al, 2015, 248) or whether these skills should be included in every subject and course as an interdisciplinary approach. On the other hand, some researchers have stated there is a need for separate course as critical thinking skills and especially critical media literacy are relatively new practical concepts to many students and educators (Herkman, 2007, 29). Some researchers argue it is easier to use critical thinking skills in certain subjects such as social sciences and history compared to natural sciences and mathematics (Cole et al, 2015, 249). The IBDP combines these arguments together as the IBDP students must complete the TOK course and write a critical TOK essay but they also must use all the instructions of the TOK in their other classes. TOK also teaches students they must be aware how all the subjects are interdisciplinary and they are linked to each other in one way or another (Cole et al, 2015, 259). The IBDP students should retain this type of thinking after graduating from the programme (Tarc and Beatty, 2012, 345). The present study considers the effect of the TOK on the learning outcomes of critical media literacy but it will consider all aspects of IBDP and ask the participants whether there are certain factors of the IBDP, which benefited critical thinking skills and further, critical media literacy.

### **2.2.2 Extended essay**

The Extended Essay (EE) is one of the main components of the IBDP and it is a compulsory assignment for graduating from the programme. The student chooses one IBDP subject for their EE but the student should research their topic in relation to other relevant subjects and disciplines (Lineham, 2013, 266) and hence, the EE should not concentrate on just one subject, as the student should gain a wider understanding why the chosen topic is significant in the global world. The EE is usually around 4,000 words long and it requires critical use of sources and referencing (Saavedra et al, 2016, 347). The EE should prepare the students for further education, as the assignment resembles university-level assignments due to its length and content (Donahue, 2016, 66). The IBDP student needs to form research questions, research interests, methodology and possible experiments for conducting their short study (Saavedra et al, 2016, 361). The EE also develops the language and understanding of the students as the assignment can be their first longer essay, which requires critical argumentation (Saavedra et al, 2016, 362).

### **2.2.3 The Finnish high school system**

Even though the present study does not concentrate on the Finnish high school system, it is necessary to describe the differences between IBDP and the Finnish system. The Finnish high school diploma system has existed since the mid-19th century. However, the current structure of the Finnish school system is even younger than the IBDP as it came into action around 1970s/1980s (Ylioppilastutkinto, 2016) and since then, a greater number of Finns have had access to secondary education. For example, there were approximately 70 students who graduated from the Finnish high school in the 1850s but the amount has considerably increased as there are approximately 35 000 students graduating from the Finnish high school each year in the 2000s. The Finnish high school has been one of the main factors for creating well-educated Finnish citizenry. The Finnish high school diploma gives easier access to apply for further education in Finland and many graduates continue to Finnish universities. The high school curricula are also constantly changing and evolving in the recent decades there has been two major curricula

changes; the previous one was created and implemented in 2003 (Opetushallitus, 2003) and the newest one was put into effect in autumn 2016. One of the main differences between the Finnish programme and the IBDP is how the IBO needs to approve each IBDP school externally (Alford et al, 2013, 2). On the other hand, Finnish high school system only exists in Finland and it answers to the Finnish government and abides by their regulations (Opetushallitus, 2014). The IBDP is not tied to any government and the organisation has designed the curriculum by their own standards (Alford et al, 2013, 2). The IBDP still needs to meet certain criteria of Finnish education system for the state to accept it as an official high school programme but they do not have any role in the actual design of the study programme. However, unlike the Finnish high school system, the IBDP assignments and final exams are also rated and assessed through the organisation and the examinations are sent to other countries for grading (Hallinger et al, 2011, 126). The IBO designs the IBDP examinations whereas the Finnish final exams are created and authorised in Finland. In Finland, the students apply to both programmes through the general joint application process in every spring. In Lyseonpuiston lukio, the national high school chooses the students according to their average grade from the junior high school diploma. If the student wishes to apply to the IBDP, they will have to attend an entrance exam. The grade from the entrance exam and their junior high school diploma create an overall rank, which can enable the entry to the IBDP. Approximately 20-30 students are selected to the pre-IB year and the number of applicants has been increasing in the recent years (Lyseonpuiston lukio, 2018).

#### **2.2.4 Studies on International Baccalaureate**

The research on the IBDP is increasing due to the growth in popularity (Tarc and Beatty, 2012, 341) but the research remains relatively limited (Alford et al, 2013, 12). Previous studies have investigated the effects of the transition between high schools and universities but Fitzgerald stated there is “scarcity of empirical research supporting the IBO’s claims regarding curricular outcomes” (Fitzgerald, 2015, 3). There are several studies which have considered the effect of the IBDP in the academic education in other countries such as Switzerland, Australia (Cole et al, 2015), Turkey, Canada (Fitzgerald,

2015), the United Kingdom (Green and Vignoles, 2012) and The United States (Bunnell, 2011; Donahue, 2016). Most of the Finnish studies have researched the role of the national high school in further education (Hautamäki et al, 2012) but the research on the IBDP in Finland remains very limited.

Lineham (2013) studied how the IBDP manages to teach and deliver its main objectives and the researcher used quantitative questionnaires to choose the participants for the final interview. All the participants had studied in the IBDP. One of the student participants noted the programme provides better options to apply to national and international universities around the world (Lineham, 2013, 269). The studies by Culross and Tarver (2011), Tarc and Beatty (2012), and Saavedra et al (2014) also echoed these results as the IBDP students who participated in their study mentioned the easier transition to further education was one of the most notable benefits of IBDP. The results of the study by Culross and Tarver indicated the IBDP can be successful at delivering their main objectives; the IBDP prepares students “by improving their writing skills and study habits, broadening and deepening their base of knowledge, and accenting critical and creative thinking skills” (Culross and Tarver, 2011, 237). Similarly, many universities around the world recognise the IBDP grading system, and for example, universities can accept foreign IBDP graduates without any language tests or consultations (Wells, 2011, 175; Alford et al, 2013, 3; Donahue, 2016, 67). In the United States, IBDP graduates may have the advantage when they apply to university as many American universities have great experiences about IBDP alumni transitioning to universities (Lineham, 2013, 269; Donahue, 2016, 68). Taylor and Porath (2006) discovered IBDP graduates were more comfortable transitioning to further education compared to regular high school graduates and they conducted their study in Canada. The IBDP graduates also thought they had gained valuable academic skills from their high school experience, which could be useful in the further education. Alford et al (2013) investigated and observed teachers and students in the classroom setting in Texas and they found out the IBDP classes were often more advanced and challenging compared to the classes of the regular high school. For example, the teachers required active participation from their students by questioning and evoking their students (Alford et al, 2013, 12). Green and Vignoles (2012) investigated whether the secondary education affected the performance in the further education in the

United Kingdom. They compared the results and experiences of people who graduated from the IBDP and the A-levels, which is the national degree for English students (Green and Vignoles, 2012, 482). They conducted this study by using the quantitative methods and the researchers discovered there could be advantages of graduating from the IBDP as the graduates were more likely to graduate from their university degree and continue to post-graduate degrees. Similarly, the participants in the study by Alford et al (2013) asserted how the IBDP had provided the graduates with skills, which were practical and useful in further education. For example, they indicated the program had prepared the students for academic learning when the students possessed “strong critical thinking skills, good study habits and time management skills, and better written and oral communication skills” (Alford et al, 2013, 3). Several researchers confirmed these ideas as well as the students who participated in their study thought these academic skills were highly valuable in the university (Taylor and Porath, 2006; Hill, 2012, 345; Tarc and Beatty, 2012, 364; Saavedra et al, 2016, 360). Some participants of studies by Taylor and Porath (2006, 154) and Fitzgerald (2015, 14) mentioned the IBDP gave a smoother transition to further education, as the first years of their university degree were very similar to the IBDP. The students also praised the ability to have the control over their study programme and goals and how the IBDP offered greater challenge compared to the national high school system. All these skills are highly useful in the further education in universities as many of the university assignments consist of these skills (Hill, 2012, 346; Clark, 2013, 898).

Saavedra et al (2016, 363) found out some participants chose IBDP as it was more challenging compared to the national high school in Mexico. The study researched the attitudes of IBDP graduates and teachers and the results indicated IBDP offers valuable information for further education. Taylor and Porath (2006) were also interested in perceptions of the IBDP graduates on their IB education. They investigated these research interests with questions about the obtained skills, time management, well-being and stress and the usefulness of the obtained degree. The results showed 87% of the IBDP graduates preferred the program and the classes as they intellectually challenged and inspired the graduates (Taylor and Porath, 2006, 153). The students also felt the IBDP offered them a learning environment where the students could express themselves and their interests.

Fitzgerald (2015, 13) also discovered that the great majority of her participants thought the IBDP was more challenging compared to the Canadian and American national high school programmes. Wilkinson and Hayden (2010, 91) found out some IBDP students noticed the importance of critical thinking because in debates situations they could not rely on individual opinions of global events and issues. The participants of Wilkinson and Hayden (2010, 90) study also mentioned media can have a biased view and the media often excludes certain messages or information when the media aims to construct a certain discourse, which could either benefit the media itself or the person or the people in power (Kupiainen and Sintonen, 2009, 124). These critical thinking skills can also form the main foundation for a student to understand critical media literacy in their education and outside of it (Tanriverdi and Apak, 2010, 1205).

Cole et al (2015) more specifically researched TOK and critical thinking skills in their research in Australian IBDP. The study was interested whether this kind of “stand-alone approach to the delivery of critical thinking skills” (Cole et al, 2015, 251) is the correct way to teach the concept. The study used mixed-method approach and methodology. The researchers found out there is a change in critical thinking styles when IBDP students move from the first year to the second of the actual programme. Similarly, the changes in the critical skill levels can indicate the possible readiness and success for the further education (Cole et al, 2015, 256). The researchers requested the national high school of Australia to consider changing the curriculum to reflect the success of IBDP as the national curriculum lacks aspects of critical thinking. During the writing process of this study in spring 2018, I found one study, which investigated the IBDP and critical media literacy (Harshman, 2018). This article was published in the same year as the present study and it concentrated on how different IBDP subject teachers from various countries taught the concept of critical media literacy in their classes. The study interviewed the chosen IBDP teachers for their pedagogical methods. The researchers found out these teachers used similar methods when they aimed to increase the student’s awareness of local and global inequalities. Teachers showed films and documentaries to illustrate social issues on capitalism, imperialism, racism, misogyny and environmental issues. Even though this was the only study which concentrated on the critical media literacy and

IBDP, there are other research articles which have discussed how critical thinking is taught and relevant in the IBDP (Taylor and Porath, 2006; Cole et al, 2015).

Cetin and Demiral (2012) analysed the literacy level of Turkish national high school students by grading and assessing them according to the IBDP criteria on literature, language and oral presentation skills, which are essential to IBDP students for completing the programme. The researchers found out the Turkish high school students could notice different literary devices from the given texts but they could not analyse it further. For example, they could not relate the literary devices to their social environment and they could not evaluate why the author chose a certain literary device. The students occasionally had fluent and clear language but they could not support their arguments with evidence and they did not know the appropriate way to demonstrate their ideas (Cetin and Demiral, 2012, 170). The students used very simple argument methods as they based their ideas on their own personal feelings and anecdotes and hence, they did not connect the presented ideas to a wider global context. The researchers also recommended future research to conduct similar experiments where the researchers would grade national high school students to the IBDP criteria, as this study by Cetin and Demiral (2012) was the first one to use this method.

### **2.3 Summary of the previous studies, and the present research interests and questions**

The previous studies used various research methods; some conducted their objectives with the use of qualitative interviews and others with quantitative surveys (Lineham, 2013; Alford et al, 2013; Culross and Tarver, 2011; Wilkinson and Hayden, 2010). Many used qualitative or quantitative observations and thus there is no shortage of different research methods. It is visible there are major differences between high school graduates and IBDP graduates when they enter the university world. Many of the IBDP graduates could easily transition from their high school to the university as they felt they possessed the necessary skills for more advanced academic studying. In comparison, Finnish students (Hautamäki et al, 2012, 79) and American students (Goldman, 2012, 14)

experienced difficulties when transferring from high school to university as their high schools had not educated the students about the necessary academic skills. However, the study by Alford et al (2013) still acknowledges global research about the IBDP is limited and researchers encourage further research about the IBDP for gaining a better understanding. Most of the previously explained studies were set in the United States (Culross and Tarver, 2011; Alford et al, 2013; Hallinger et al, 2011; Lineham, 2013; Wilkinson and Hayden, 2010) as the country has one of the highest numbers of IBDP schools and students in the world (Bunnell, 2011, 69). Hence, researchers should study the IBDP in other countries as well. There is a considerable lack of research about the effect of graduating and transitioning from the Finnish national high school and the Finnish IBDP and this research could give valuable ideas for future researchers and educators and even other officials designing high school curricula. The research interests of this study examine whether the critical media literacy is present in the IBDP and if the concept benefits the IBDP graduates when they continue with their studies after the programme. I chose these methods to answer the following research questions of this study:

1. What is the understanding of IBDP graduates on critical media literacy and its necessity?
  - a. How is critical media literacy related to the social awareness and global empowerment?
2. How is critical media literacy visible in the IBDP according to the experiences of the IBDP graduates?
  - a. How IBDP graduates learned critical media literacy in the IBDP?
  - b. What kind of methods should educators implement to teach about critical media literacy?
3. What is the relationship between understanding of critical media literacy and the academic success according to IBDP graduates?
  - a. How is critical media literacy necessary in the further academic education?

### **3 Research methods and methodology**

The present study used qualitative methods for conducting and analysing the research interests. The study consisted of qualitative interviews and thematic analysis methods.

This chapter discusses why I decided to conduct the research with the chosen qualitative methods. The chapter will also state the participant information and the used research instruments. I will also state any possible ethical issues with this study.

#### **3.1 Incorporated research methods**

This study used qualitative research methods for answering the research questions, analysing the results and conducting the thesis. I conducted this thesis using semi-open interviews and thematic analysis and I chose these methods due to the need for personal statements about the topic of the thesis (Salkind, 2012, 199; Denscombe, 2010, 175). There has been very little research on the relationship between critical media literacy and the IBDP and this research could provide valuable ideas for the future researchers and educators. According to Marshall and Rossman, the qualitative research methods are more valid in this study as it describes and analyses the so-called “little-known phenomena” (Marshall and Rossman, 2006, 53) where it is better to analyse the qualitative experiences before moving onto the quantitative research. In addition, the qualitative study methods are ideal for this research, since the amount of IBDP graduates from Lyseopuiston lukio is quite small and it would be difficult to conduct surveys or questionnaires on such a small sample. In addition, the qualitative research methods are more suitable for the present research since I aim to make recommendations for future research and I will not generalise the findings (Denscombe, 2010, 298; Silverman, 2013, 14). This study used open-ended interviewing methods and thematic analysis for analysing the interviews (Denscombe, 2010, 175).

### **3.2 Participant info and recruitment**

I started recruiting my participants in autumn 2017. The participants were recruited via Facebook from a Facebook group for Lyseonpuiston lukio's IB-alumni. I sent a message containing the essential information about my study and the ethical considerations for their privacy and confidentiality. These messages stated they had right to decline without any reason if they did not wish to partake in my thesis interviews. I also highlighted they can ignore the message as they did not need to answer them. Any replies to my messages did not affect the treatment of my potential participants. I created a recruitment letter (Appendix 1) which I presented to my potential participants if they were interested in participating in my research (Bryman, 141). After the interviews, I presented my participants a debrief form (Appendix 2) in case they needed any contact information for the future about the study, the researcher or the supervisor.

As this thesis used a specified group of people, I used purposive sampling to gain my participants. In qualitative research, purposive sample method chooses participants according to the stated criteria and hence, I had inclusion and exclusion criteria for my participants (Bryman, 2012, 416). I only studied IBDP graduates who had graduated from the Diploma Programme from Lyseonpuiston lukio. Potential participants should have fully completed the programme and the students who dropped out from the programme would have not met the criteria. The age, graduation year, gender or ethnicity did not matter for taking part to this research. The participants needed to have sufficient language skill in either English or Finnish for completing the interview. Some researchers have suggested it is necessary for the participant and the researchers to have fluent language skills in the interviewed language to avoid linguistic and verbal difficulties during the communication (Tienari, Vaara and Meriläinen, 2005, 112). I also concentrated on the experiences in the further academic education and the participants who continued to other types of education levels such as vocational schools or universities of applied sciences could not have taken part to this study. The pedagogical methods and requirements of these schools can be very different compared to the university education.

I recruited ten participants for my interview and all the participants were female graduates. I tried to recruit male graduates as well, but they did not respond to my

messages or they could not participate in the interviews due to tight schedules. It should be also noted that the IBDP in Lyseopuiston lukio has been female dominated in the past years and hence, there are more female graduates as well. However, I did not question the gender identity of my participants due to ethical and personal considerations and hence, I have used she/her pronouns in the analysis to avoid possible confusions with singular they/them pronouns. All the participants had Finnish nationality. Some of them had completed their master or bachelor's level studies and one was studying in the PhD level. Some participants had continued to the working life after their degree completion. The longest interview lasted 93 minutes and the shortest interview lasted approximately 39 minutes. The average interview length was almost 59 minutes. I conducted the interviews either in English or in Finnish and if I used direct quotations from the Finnish interviews, I translated them to English. One IBDP teacher was also contacted for his teaching methods via email as all the participants stated he had the best methods for teaching critical media literacy.

### **3.3 Instruments**

I conducted the interviews via Skype or Facebook Messenger video call application or in person. The interviewer and the participant used a computer or a phone for the interview if it was conducted with Skype or Facebook. I used the tape recorder applications found in my phone and in my laptop to record the interview. The recordings were kept safely in my phone and they were named according to the interview order (i.e. Interview1 to Interview10) so the participants could not be identified from the name of the recording file. I conducted the thematic analysis with Atlas.ti analysis programme, which is a computer programme, used for qualitative analysis (Jolanki and Karhunen, 2010, 399). I deleted all the files after the completion of this thesis to protect the confidentiality of my participants.

### **3.4 Interview process, decoding and analysis**

The interview schedule contained four main topics (Appendix 3) and I used the thematic interviewing method, where these topics were constructed according to the main themes of this thesis (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 9). The first topic consisted of general information such as their age, graduation year and the reason for applying to the IBDP and their feelings and opinions about the programme after the graduation. The second topic was interested in how the participants understood and defined the concept of critical media literacy. The third topic concentrated on how critical media literacy was visible and necessary in the Diploma Programme. For example, I asked questions about which subjects required critical media literacy for more advanced understanding about the subject and whether critical media literacy had any effect on the grades of the assignments and exams. The fourth topic contained questions about the life after the Diploma Programme. I questioned about whether critical media literacy was crucial in their free time and professions. Some of the questions in this topic also discussed about the free time of the participants; for example, if they paid attention to media messages such as traditions and stereotypes while they consume the popular media. Prior to the real interviews, I conducted one test interview with an actual participant. If the interview had lacked anything, I would have made some changes and continued to interview this participant for another time with these new changes. However, the interview was successful enough that I continued to conduct my consecutive interviews with the similar interview schedule. I also included this test interview as my actual interview, since it was adequate for the further analysis. The interviews generally followed the interview schedule but I occasionally switched the order of the questions and topics whenever it was necessary. Thus, my interviews applied the semi-structured interviewing method and I asked some additional questions if I needed a clarification or if the participant was not familiar with the topics or the terms (Denscombe, 2010, 192).

I only transcribed the content of the interviews and I did not use any phonetic symbols because this thesis is interested in the content of the interviews rather than how the content was discussed or how my participants behaved in the interview session. I used the thematic analysis for the thesis because it is the ideal method for analysing the interview

content compared to other analysis methods, which might concentrate on the interaction and the manners of speech (Ruusuvuori, 2010, 424). I used technique by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Jolanki and Karhunen (2010, 399-400) for the thematic and topic-oriented coding. After I created the interview transcripts, I read them multiple times and looked for repeated themes and patterns within the interview transcripts. Then I identified the repeated patterns and transferred them to applicable codes. Altogether, I used fourteen different codes to analyse the interviews. These themes were organised behind the main topics as well; for example, I analysed the interviews with the theme on the necessity of critical media literacy and organised it in relation with the IBDP, further education and other aspects of life. I essentially transcribed the interviews in verbatim, where I excluded unnecessary filler words because the semantics of the interview were not significant for the transcription. Thematic analysis concentrates on the meaning behind words and messages and hence, it does not analyse the way participants use or choose their words. In other words, thematic analysis is interested in the experiences itself, not how the participants communicate their experiences (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 9). Hence, there was no need to transcribe the way my participants used their words or communicated with me during the interview process (Ruusuvuori, 2010, 425). For example, I did not recode the possible pauses or stutters in my interview transcriptions. I also excluded some filler words such as 'like', 'then', 'stuff', 'right', 'you know', 'but', 'well' and other similar words in English and Finnish for creating more cohesive interview scripts. This way it would be easier to quote the interviews without constantly using the series of ellipsis inside the quotes. In addition, the quotes will only contain the necessary information and they will not take too much space from the actual thesis. However, I did not correct the grammar or any syntax errors in the interview scripts and hence, the possible quotations may contain grammar mistakes. Altogether, the transcripts provided 180 pages and approximately 60,000 words of text, where an average transcript was about 18 pages and 6,000 words long.

The study also used thematic analysis methods suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006, 16) and Jolanki and Karhunen (2010, 399). After transcription, I familiarised myself with the transcripts and made a document for suggestions about the hypothetical codes. I chose four main themes, understanding of critical media literacy, critical media literacy and IB,

critical media literacy and further education, and critical media literacy and other life aspects. I divided these main themes further into sub-themes for better analysis. The first theme understanding of critical media literacy discussed how they defined the concept, what kind of skills they possessed and how they used their skills and how critical media literacy is necessary in the modern world and education. The second theme the IB and critical media literacy explored how the critical media literacy was taught, how it was necessary and how the participants learned critical media literacy in the programme. The third theme further explored the future education and critical media literacy. The third main theme was divided into other small themes; one concentrated more on the further academic education and the need for critical media literacy in the academic education.

### **3.5 Ethical considerations**

There are no specific ethical issues with the present research as I only explored the general experiences about issues and experiences about education and media. For example, none of my questions and topics explored private and personal problems with common social issues such as sexuality, disability or racial injustice. If participants discussed these topics, they talked about them in a macro-level by relating these topics to the problems of the social systems and media cultures. However, there can be ethical issues and any research and hence, I intended to reduce the possible ethical problems in the study with the following arrangements (Silverman, 2013, 161). I used recruitment methods, which minimised the coercion to participate in the research and expected participants to give their full and informed consent to my research interviews (Bryman, 2012, 139; Salkind, 2012, 86). In my recruitment message, I first explained they have the right to decline the interview offer without any repercussions and I highlighted they do not need to respond to the message. No intentional harm was caused to the participants and any possible harm or the feeling of discomfort was minimised in various ways. Before I initiated the interviewing process, I informed the participants of their various rights and how I was going to respect their privacy and confidentiality (Kuula and Tiitinen, 2010, 450). The participants were given right to refuse answering any questions without giving a reason. I aimed to make the interview situation comfortable by stating there were no right or

wrong answers to my questions (Tienari et al, 2005, 123). I also told them before and during the interview that they can stop the interview at any point if it seemed necessary. In the end of the interview, I again notified my participants about their rights. I asked if they had mentioned anything I could not use in the interview and every participant confirmed I could use anything they had discussed during the interview for my analysis (Bryman, 2012, 136). I also mentioned they had few weeks to think about their participation and contact me if they felt like they did not wish me to use the interview or part of it for my thesis. None of the participants contacted me afterwards about these concerns. In the debrief form I also included contact information of my supervisor if they needed to ask any further questions about the thesis and its process.

I respected the confidentiality of the participants but it should be noted the identification can be possible as the data pool of this thesis is very small since there are about two hundred IBDP graduates from Lyseonpuiston lukio (Marshall and Rossman, 2008, 72; Bryman, 2012, 136). I did not reveal certain information about my participants as the participant could be easily identified from very small details. I also asked questions regarding their anonymity such as whether I could reveal certain information which could make them identifiable or if I should use more general and non-descriptive information for protecting their identity (Bryman, 2012, 137). I also contacted some participants for their opinions after the interviews whether I could reveal certain information about them which could make it easier for some readers to identify them. For this reason, some information may be vague, especially in the case of university degree programmes and current professions. Even then, some participants could be identified by their relatives or close acquaintances due to the small data pool. In some instances, I contacted some participants for further clarifications to avoid misunderstandings.

## **4 Analysis**

This part of the thesis analyses the interviews by exploring the ideas and opinions discussed by the participants. The analysis is divided into four main themes; the critical media literacy, the International Baccalaureate, the further education and the other aspects of life. The last theme discusses critical media literacy in the work and free time.

The themes were created and organised according to the research questions of this thesis which have been mentioned in the end of the summary for previous studies chapter 2.3. However, I will discuss how my research questions were answered in the chapter number 5 for discussion.

### **4.1 Theme 1: Critical media literacy**

#### **4.1.1 Understanding and defining the concept**

All the participants had a general understanding about the concept of critical media literacy but there were differences about how they comprehended the concept. The participants understood critical media literacy through source analysis and critical thinking, where they critically analyse the media source for understanding its reason and agenda for publication and the messages behind the source. All the participants expressed the audience should not blindly accept anything in the media as the truth but analyse its background and intentions as well. Some also mentioned how the media creators may exclude or include certain topics or how they often rely on hegemonies and stereotypes:

“Media literacy is being able to take a piece broadcasted, not only in the media but in the advertising world and being able to understand the message but also challenge the message. Understand what the message means to you and tries to portray to you and how it might be, maybe, including or excluding different subjects.” (Participant 1)

All the participants discussed people should be vigilant when reading and consuming different forms of media. Some mentioned there are various levels of fact and fiction where some media may have a certain level of neutrality and objectivity but other type of media can exaggerate or deceive for controlling the people. In other words, there is always a point of view to any published media and information, whether it is subjective or objective. Many mentioned media readers and consumers should be able to understand the intentions of media and the filtration of certain media messages. Hence, when people form their opinions, they should research the subject and look for other sources and opposing opinions before they can properly understand the full picture. No one mentioned any background to the concept of critical media literacy such as how the concept itself was constructed and how it originated from multiple disciplines and theories from cultural studies to sociology and pedagogy. All the definitions concentrated on how individuals can use critical media literacy as a tool in their media consumption. The participants related the concept to critical thinking but they could not think of any other similar concepts such as other forms of literacies and media use.

The interview also asked participants to define source analysis since many participants understood the concept of critical media literacy through this concept. According to their statements, the reader should understand the purpose, ideology, context and origin of the source and how they affect the media message. The reader must examine the source for its reliability, capacity and relevance but also understand how their own point of view can affect this analysis. Some participants said the readers should also consider how some people can easily manipulate media sources and they illustrated their ideas with examples from cultural primary sources and the Wikipedia website. They also expressed students should never use Wikipedia as a reference material in their professional or academic work. The interview discussed whether there have been any specific news events, where the critical media literacy and source analysis could have been necessary. Participants mentioned terms and events such as fake news, climate change, the presidency and the

presidential campaign of Donald Trump and Brexit. According to some participants, Brexit was highly polarised event in the media and it was difficult to find correct information about the event. Brexit also divided the United Kingdom as a nation, especially according to the age of the voters. Participant 1 questioned the credibility of Breitbart and Participant 6 also mentioned the Finnish news source “MV-lehti”. These both sources have caused a lot of discussion in the past years about its legitimacy, journalistic responsibility and ethics. For example, Participant 1 expressed her surprise when the Finnish national high school used Breitbart as a reference in the final examinations. In her opinion, the problem arose from the fact the people who created the exam did not know Breitbart had a questionable reputation and not from the actual use of the source itself. In addition, Participant 6 questioned people who use MV-lehti as a basis for their arguments, especially if these people consider this source to be as reliable and credible compared to other news sources such as the Finnish newspaper “Helsingin Sanomat”.

#### **4.1.2 Necessity of critical media literacy in the current society**

Participants expressed there is a current need for the critical media literacy in educational, social and personal level. The education should reflect and follow the changing global environment, and the increasing use and need for technology and some participants were afraid educators do not implement these changes at a sufficient rate. For example, some participants expressed their fear and discomfort, how some people do not recognise the need for the critical media literacy skills when they consume media and technology and these people continue using questionable sources for justifying their opinions and arguments. Furthermore, all participants at least partially agreed the current news events, the globalisation, and the availability of technologies and other media tools cause the nature of information to be simultaneous and unreliable, which requires a more prominent need for critical media literacy skills:

“In the past you read a newspaper, no one could comment it, except the people around your dining table. But now, there can be 10 000 comments inside 24 hours. It may open it [the topic] a bit, gives more point of views.” (Participant 10)

Many participants said the technological nature of the society has changed the behaviour of the people. For example, some participants stated more people can access the technology in the present compared to the past and hence, there are also more circulating opinions and arguments as well. Some also mentioned a speaker with better communication skills can more easily persuade other people to believe them and value the speaker’s opinions in higher regard. This is not a new phenomenon per se, but the media and technology can help the leaders simultaneously persuade more people from various backgrounds and environments. Following this sentiment, participants argued the globalising world prioritises people to acquire these critical media literacy skills. According to Participant 2, some people tend to make comments without explaining them further or they might make rash judgements about the information:

“Things are said without justifications, they are said abruptly and rapidly and then many adequate news articles are summarised in the titles so the reader can only read the title.” (Participant 2)

In her opinion, these rash judgements can cause dangerous situations as some journalists currently use stimulating or populist titles in their articles which titillate the attention of the reader but simultaneously cause misunderstandings. Some participants said many articles do not properly cite their references or they take selected sentences out of the context from a long research paper. This can cause people to believe the opposite of what the research or journal articles argued in the first place, especially if they do not read the entire article. Participant 10 stated some students might also use this method as a time-saving mechanism but it can lead to critical situations where the students share falsely understood information in their classes and assignments. Participants also stated the current society requires a constant use of media and technology. Some participants said it is necessary for people to use technology and media for services such as online banking and verification and some people need to conduct all their work using media and technology. Participant 4 described this with the term digital leap (*digiloikka* in Finnish) which is currently happening in the personal and educational environment. The

technology is more advanced as well; some argued smartphones are more common and if they have an internet connection, they also have a direct access to any information and media in the internet. Participant 4 did not directly agree with the notion that a well-rounded understanding and knowledge of various ICT tools can increase the critical media literacy skills. Participant 4 mentioned there could be a correlation with the idea but the technology use does not necessarily lead to better critical media literacy skills as some people can be blind to some problematic behaviours in the internet as they are so accustomed to them. In addition, some participants had few negative views about the media and the technology in relation with the critical media literacy skills. As the need for the media and technology has increased, it can make it more difficult for people to look for the reliable information when the internet is saturated with contradicting and unreliable media:

“If the internet is constantly at your fingertip, then you might mistakenly look for other things or get lost in irrelevant websites. But it is also super easy to find just some answer from the internet and it requires resilience to look for the right answer and analyse it more thoroughly.” (Participant 8)

Even though, some participants had concerns about the ICT tools and the internet on the critical media literacy skills of the individual, many still had positive views about the internet. Some stated internet users should understand how algorithms and background processes of various websites and applications can affect the appearance of different websites and even advertisement. They expressed people cannot be as easily misled about the provided internet content if they knew how various social media sites create their content and ‘feeds’. For example, some participants mentioned their Facebook looks different compared to their friends according to their preferences and interests. Participant 4 also mentioned when she had compared their YLE news application feed with a friend, these feeds looked completely personalised as the application lets the user choose their interests and favourite topics. Some participants also discussed how better understanding of ICT tools may directly increase critical media literacy skills as they can have a better access to information since they know how to look for it. The internet users can look for any articles from any country with better accessibility and convenience:

“It is much easier to verify the reliability of your information if you have the access to technology. You have a quick access to different material for comparison. It is another question whether this material is reliable, but it is much easier to look for additional information and check your facts than if you would need to visit the library for that.” (Participant 6)

Participants discussed there are greater amount of people using the media and information technologies who have never had a direct access to the simultaneous information. In addition, everyone can also produce media and information and not just consume it. Participants most commonly mentioned how younger children have wider and more unrestricted access to media and the internet than ever before. For example, some participants mentioned they did not have their personal computer until they were in high school and smartphones were non-existent during their time in the junior high school. This increasing amount of technology can require a greater need for critical media literacy skills and education, and some participants argued younger generations might lack the cognitive skills to understand different media messages or filter the harmful ones out. Some participants expressed their concern how younger generations might not be able to comprehend how any uploaded content may permanently stay in the internet and certain content can harm other people as well:

“They [the younger generations] are exposed to various medias at quite young age and they cannot necessarily separate the Instagram posts which are secretly adverts because no one has never taught about them. Or they cannot question something they see in the social media.” (Participant 4)

There are also nations where the internet and media has been very limited in the past and due to various social reasons and economic developments, more people can access media and different technologies. Some discussed how the increase in the media and technology use in the globalising world require more critical and media conscious people. Some stated people from diverse cultures, ethnicities and traditions can simultaneously share their opinions and experiences in the global world. If an individual does not understand these affecting social and environmental factors, the context in the media or even in the comment section of a website can be difficult to interpret. Some nations also control their media or fabricate the information and hence, readers should be careful when reading articles from various nations. Some stated it can be necessary to be able to understand

different viewpoints and how to critically evaluate them as it can be beneficial in various situations. Some participants also said it is important to gain more knowledge about the world affairs as it can help with the understanding:

“My flat mate is from Senegal and because she has more exposure to more media than I have, I didn’t know there is still slave market going on in Africa and we were studying these videos. And I was like ‘oh my god that is still happening’, that’s part of the things that my curiosity is still from the IB I think, I am talking with people and finding out these new things that I would have never known about. [...] It creates a bit of hesitation of what you believe in the world.” (Participant 10)

Participants acknowledged older generations have also started using ICT tools in greater amount. Some mentioned younger generations are often educated about ICT use by their parents and school. As younger generations grow into the technology, their environment can determine limits and rules to protect their psycho-social well-being. Younger generations can have more experience and familiarity with different media technologies as they have been using them for the great portion of their lives. However, this does not apply as strictly to older generations in their opinion. Older generations have not grown into modern technology and the need to use technology was not significant few decades ago. Hence, some participants mentioned this is visible in the online behaviour of the older generations. Some participants stated older generations often post questionable status updates to Facebook and they do not have any sense of filtering. They continued older generations can be even socially expected to understand the technology from the very beginning, since they have finished their mandatory education and have never received any education on technological matters. Hence, the older generations can be left without any knowledge on media and technology compared to younger generations whose school curriculums may include media and technology classes. This can cause critical situations as the older generations do not have the skills to filter and understand the media:

“They [older generations] go around clicking like some adverts and news articles which might not be real news articles and take them as the actual truth.” (Participant 7)

Altogether, all participants agreed there is a need for critical media literacy skills in at least some of these social aspects and groups due to the technological advancements and developments. Even though these advancements and improved internet connections enable people to access any information anywhere, some participants argued this might not lead to heightened awareness as people can still choose their sources of information. The constant stream of real time reactions from selected sources may easily shape people's beliefs. Some participants stated this can cause people to live in so called 'social bubbles'. If a person lives in a 'bubble', they might only receive comments and ideas from a certain point of view which further reassures their personal beliefs. If these people only read their news or consume their media from certain sources, they cannot learn about different global events:

"It is very alarming how certain crises which lead to deaths of tens or hundreds of people are broadcasted and some are not. If it happens in Paris or London, it is newsworthy but if it is somewhere in Somalia or Sudan or wherever which is not this kind of Western country, so why that is not? So, in my opinion, it is very important to illustrate that there are others than us and your small bubble." (Participant 2)

Participant 10 also agreed with this former quote and she concentrated on the term "unconscious bias". According to her definition, unconscious bias is a way to perceive the world where people often unconsciously choose their sources according to their access and availability. For example, if a student is presented with two articles, they might choose the media which is easier to read or consume due to its language, length or vocabulary. In free time, people might choose the sources which they can access with the least amount of efficiency:

"You might read for example Lapin Kansa every day, that might just give you very subjective point of view for a Laplander instead of what they talk about in Africa. [...] But they need to take an African newspaper and how they write about it. Then you have a different point of view and a different culture, background in there as well. (Participant 10)

The participant 10 mentioned this unconscious bias concept is present in all the people as it can be something uncontrollable. Hence, it might not be necessarily anything dangerous if the people aim to educate themselves about various global events and look for the

opposing arguments for their own beliefs. The unconscious bias may reflect the social and economic background of the people and this participant expressed people should be more understanding of various point of views and aim for better dialogue as they can destroy prejudices. In addition, people may say inconsiderate remarks to other people but the Participant 10 stated this might not indicate their real worldview but a lack of social awareness. This can be caused by unconscious biases but they can become dangerous if they change into conscious biases as they may lead to dangerous ideological behaviours.

Furthermore, all the participants agreed critical media literacy cannot be optional in any situation or they could not think of a situation where people would not need critical media literacy. Most participants still argued that if you have learned the critical media literacy skills, it is difficult to completely ignore them when analysing the world. Participant 9 still also implied educated people should notice their privileged position if they demanded critical media literacy skills from people who have never learned about them:

“If you sort of handle that skill, I think it would be very difficult to close your eyes from it and not look through that [critical media literacy] lens. But on the other hand, even when this thought feels bizarre to me, not every person can have these skills so can you demand it from them?” (Participant 9)

Many participants highlighted critical media literacy education is essential as everyone has the right for these skills. Some participants also argued it can be easy to forget critical media literacy skills if a person is emotionally invested in some event and even though this should not be acceptable per se, other people should be understanding of their situation. Participant 10 also discussed how many people can use critical media literacy when it benefits them or when they criticise the opposing opinions. The interview also questioned whether this was true amongst the participants. All participants were often more likely to believe information if it was closer to their own beliefs. Many explained this as a natural, social or psychological phenomenon as in their opinion, it can be easier to reinforce one’s beliefs rather than dismantle them. Alternatively, people may forget to challenge the information if it fits with their ideology. Some participants explained this in relation to social bubbles as well since they strengthen any beliefs when the opposing arguments are invisible as mentioned in the previous paragraphs. In contrast, some

participants believed they would not necessarily accept anything which was ideologically or politically close with their ideas. Instead, they would check the reliability of this information to reinforce to their initial beliefs. Participant 8 also had read an article about this idea in Tiede magazine which is a Finnish science magazine (Ruukki, 2017, December) and she stated she aimed to have open but critical mind when consuming media, especially if it reflected her personal beliefs:

“Very seldom [I consume media] in a manner, where I am ‘yeah yeah, this is true, this is super good’. [...] I order Tiede magazine, so they had the same topic in it; ‘if something is too good to be true, most likely it is not’.” (Participant 8)

In the topic of the respective skills of the participants, all participants mentioned their self-assessed skills were at least moderate or adequate. Some participants expressed their skills were higher than the presumed average and this higher skill level was explained by the interest to the topic and the actual necessity of it in their free time, profession or academic degree. Everyone still mentioned their skills had room for improvements and they still make mistakes as they might make inaccurate assumptions about different media messages and events. Similarly, most participants explained they were occasionally too lazy to use their criticality in their free time when it was not a requirement by their teachers, employers or other authority figures. Participant 9 said her main problem also was a simplistic worldview and learning style as she often assumes any taught information can be factual as well:

“I am kind of naïve, I like to think the world is quite OK place. Everything is quite well here. Of course, especially now that I have graduated from IB, I can understand there are other things than the text and the picture behind it [media].” (Participant 9)

Participant 9 understood and explained this kind of world view is problematic to her. Her friend had also challenged this participant to change her way of thinking and hence, she said she wished to change this issue as it would also benefit her educational success, for example, in the case of her argumentation and debate skills. Alternatively, many participants were not concerned about their level of critical media literacy skills as they stated critical media literacy is a skill you learn through life experience and it is not

learned solely by educational classes on critical media literacy. Thus, they acknowledged developing critical media literacy skills is a lifelong process. Participant 10 also mentioned it is impossible for anyone to completely possess the perfect critical media literacy skills since there is always that “unconscious bias” she had mentioned earlier:

“I don’t think anyone is ever going to be able to completely learn critical media literacy because there’s always something that, like why did you choose to read that one and not the other article. [...] There’s always a choice that a person makes when they’re deciding what to read and we only have a certain amount of time, you cannot read everything.” (Participant 10)

#### **4.1.3 Implementation of critical media literacy in education**

There was no clear consensus when the education on critical media literacy was ideal. Some participants thought it was better to teach about in the high school when the student would have better understanding about the world. Some thought this was too late and teachers should implement critical media literacy in their education in Finnish junior high school (yläaste/yläkoulu). Participant 10 highlighted how it is important to gain critical media literacy education before the high school level, as when students enter the high school, they can have social values and opinions which have been influenced by their relatives and peers and the internet and without critical media literacy, they might not possess the mind-set to critically evaluate these values and opinions. Some participants stated the education should also reflect the age and the developed level of cognitive abilities of the students. For example, some mentioned it could be taught in any level because the critical media literacy education can be age appropriate for any school grade and some also stated critical media literacy could be taught in a playful manner in the primary school level. Furthermore, some participants thought there is a need for critical media literacy when children start using the technology. In their opinion, the children can access information which can be harmful for them and hence, critical media literacy education should be already present as early as possible in the primary school. Parents should also have the authority to restrict the technology use of their children for their protection. Some participants stated the critical media literacy education should be mandatory in the junior high school level, so every student would have experienced it in

the Finnish compulsory school system. In Finland, compulsory school system ends after the junior high school and these participants stated every student in Finland should have the right for these skills when they are part of the national curriculum, which all the schools must follow:

“In that way, there would not be any inequality because everyone would have had some knowledge about this topic [critical media literacy] when everyone is still in the same level.” (Participant 2)

There are several reasons why critical media literacy is necessary in education and in real life according to the participants. Some participants thought the Finnish education system is too simplistic and the curriculum educates about common knowledge without teaching the students how to criticise this knowledge or relating the knowledge to bigger, global context. Some school assignments such as multiple-choice exams can be also too trivial and unchallenging, where the students only memorise the information without putting any input to their learning processes. Some participants criticised the traditional pedagogical methods where the teacher has a monologue in front of the class. They argued this kind of teaching does not benefit the critical thinking and literacy skills as the students do not have opportunities for challenging their personal or their classmate’s opinions. Some participants stated critical media literacy education can be optional or even non-existent for some degrees and this can cumulatively cause further problems for the students. In addition, the concept can be absent even from the school material and curriculum, which causes difficulties for the teachers to educate about critical media literacy skills. For example, Participant 2 shared an experience where her friend had trouble educating the class about critical media literacy and analysis methods because the text book did not provide any instructions. She shared her methods which she had learned in her English classes in the IBDP:

“And they [the teacher friend] were completely astonished; ‘seriously, they actually teach about this [in the IB degree], oh this is terrible, we have never, even in the university, people still fight with these in the university’”. (Participant 2)

Critical media literacy also teaches about skills which can be beneficial outside of the school environment. For example, some said there can be hidden advertisement in social media and it is important to identify them amongst other posts in the internet. This is especially important for younger generations who are accustomed to the technology and social media and might not challenge their internet behaviour. Participants also stated critical media literacy education can protect people as they learn to filter for example, stereotypically harmful information and acknowledge their own personal boundaries in the media consumption. Hence, they had various ideas how to teach the critical media literacy for students from all levels and ages. Most ideas concentrated on creating awareness and challenging the thinking styles by using examples from the popular media or the real life. For example, the teacher could show the class articles on a recent topic from contradictory sources and the class could analyse the differences in the point of views and justifications or reasoning to the given arguments. Some participants thought this would be the best way to teach about critical media literacy in the novice level as the students learn the concept with practical examples which could be interesting or familiar to them. The teacher could provide the class with sources with varying levels of reliability, transparency and authenticity. Alternatively, the teachers could choose examples from the entertainment industry in the form of songs, movies, adverts or even children's stories, since they often teach about the traditional values and hegemonies which can be taken for granted. All exercises should challenge students' opinions and beliefs and the teachers should advocate their students to be receptive to different point of views. The critical media literacy education for beginners should be done in a comfortable environment, where everyone has the right to voice their opinions. The students should learn to accept they can make mistakes and in some topics, there are no right or wrong answers. In addition, the students should learn the concept of critical media literacy without difficult terms or concepts where the classroom would require high-level academic argumentation. The beginner classes should also concentrate on instigating the students to ask questions and discuss about the state of the world so they would not accept any stated ideas as absolute truths:

“Maybe they [teachers] should highlight the importance of practice and how you should not be dismissed. Too often there is this manner of teaching where they say, ‘you cannot read it that way, you cannot analyse it like that, that is wrong’” (Participant 2)

## **4.2 Theme 2: The International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme**

### **4.2.1 General information about the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme**

No one directly applied to the IBDP because the degree included critical media literacy, critical thinking, Theory of Knowledge and other similar concepts. Most of the participants applied to the programme because of the unique IB study methods and pedagogy and because it was different from the mainstream. The studying in English was one of the main priorities for participants as well. Some participants applied to the degree because they had heard about the degree from their friends and relatives or educators and they had had positive experiences with the programme. Some students wanted to go abroad after the IB degree and they thought the degree could be more useful abroad compared to the Finnish national high school degree. The following quotes explain some other or more specific reasons for applying to the programme:

“I chose IB primarily because its extensive concentration on the literature, both in Finnish and in English.” (Participant 2)

“Generally, I was interested in the curriculum and the programme as it had a clear structure and only six subjects, and you could study in a tight group environment.” (Participant 8)

“I liked the English language and I had always had fun studying it. I had heard the IB programme has very good team spirit as it is just that one group, so those two were the main reasons which attracted me.” (Participant 9)

Some participants mentioned they wanted to study in the programme as the pedagogical methods dive deeper into the chosen subjects and thus, the IBDP provides greater

understanding about the respective topics. The participants did not directly mention the prevalence of critical media literacy for the reason they chose to apply for the degree. Some participants acknowledged they joined the programme as it had a different method of studying and teaching. As IBDP students usually choose six subjects they study during the programme, these participants argued this study method could be more useful in the further education as they would have learned to study fewer subjects in a more advanced level. Other participants disagreed with this statement; when they started their university degrees they did not have as extensive knowledge on some topics if they chose the wrong subjects during the IBDP.

#### **4.2.2 Critical media literacy and the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme**

All the participants had learned and conceptualised the concept of critical media literacy during the IB programme. Some had started questioning and criticising ideas and events prior to the IB degree. For example, Participant 8's family had an academic background which challenged her way of thinking. Participant 4 also questioned whether this was caused by the IBDP or the psycho-social developments as the participant could have started to question the world due to her age rather than education. All the participants gained the pragmatic and systematic tools how to critically evaluate and analyse media and information as their previous school levels or their environment had never required the participants to use them. Participants said the amount of critical media literacy depended on the chosen IBDP subjects. As English is a compulsory subject in the IBDP, every participant stated the English subject contained most amount of critical media literacy. All the participants had had the same teacher in their English classes and everyone highlighted how this teacher had greatest amount of dedication to critical media literacy and other similar concepts. For example, the students analysed adverts and song lyrics to understand the meanings behind them:

“He [teacher] would show us different ads and Fergie songs and we would need to come up with different imagery, different symbols, different meanings and you know, it was one of these eureka moments.” (Participant 1)

“For example, in the English classes, it [critical media literacy] was incredibly effective and memorable. [...] We look at some advert, why is it selling cereal with this happy family imagery and do I get happy and receive this 5-member nuclear family if I eat these little bit more expensive cereals?” (Participant 6)

The pedagogical methods of the programme included some highly valuable lessons on how to understand the world which contributed to the comprehension of critical media literacy. Some classes required the students to debate with each other and question any obvious arguments by discussing the opposing opinions. All the participants stated their classmates and teachers often required them to explain themselves and they could not state any ideas without further analysis or providing reliable sources for their arguments. In their classes, everyone had to stay vigilant and in case the teacher or the classmate used questionable argumentation methods. Some participants had learned valuable skills how to analyse any media or information from their IB classes. For example, IBDP teachers had taught them to consider the opposing arguments by asking ‘why not’ instead of ‘why’. This way they could look for reasons or justifications why some people did not have similar worldviews. Some participants said this method was highly useful after the IBDP as this method provided them an understanding about controversial events in the world. Participant 2 mentioned this was difficult to her at first, since she was used to the traditional learning style, where the student or the teacher states the facts without any further analysis or discussion. When she transferred from the Finnish junior high school to the IBDP, she had the highest grades but they started declining when this participant continued to the first IB year after the pre-IB year. Participant 2 had difficulties in her history classes until she learned the ideal coping mechanism which taught her the right study techniques for the IB programme:

“When I did pre-IB, I was amazing at history because I could get best grades by writing essays about how the first world war began because of the events in Sarajevo and that’s it, you know why and how the first world war began. And obviously when I did that with my IB essays, I got like zero points or something because that wasn’t something that was expected of you, it was you know, observing the events that had led to the tension between the different countries and blah blah. Quite a long progress. And I felt that the history book that we used, it was even too rather difficult for me to follow the level of argument it used, therefore I went to the library and borrowed some Finnish history books. And then actually what I did, that I read all of them and compared what all of them had told me and with that I managed to build an argument and then I started to succeed with my history essays as well. But basically, I did use the same technique that they had been telling me at school that you must compare in order to form your argument.” (Participant 2)

Participant 1 discussed how it was useful to see these both sides of the coin in practice in their economics class. In this class exercise, the economics teacher had asked their Finnish and Nepalese economics classes to create a video about the local economic inequalities and disparities. In the first video, the Finnish students discussed how the bus tickets prices were too expensive, which caused inequalities in the area as poorer people such as these students could not afford the prices. The second video was made by Nepalese students and they discussed about how the freshwater is polluted in their environment, which causes diseases and even deaths due to dehydration. The economics teachers showed the Finnish video first and Participant 1 said the whole class identified with the expensive bus ticket issue as they also had experienced this problem. The class was ready to demand changes to this issue from the local government until they watched the Nepalese video. After they learned about the social issues from Nepal, their initial reactions diminished as they could relate their experiences to the global context. The participant thought this was an excellent way to practice critical media literacy as it is easy to exaggerate experiences and opinions without considering the other side of the coin or having a contrast to the rest of the world.

“Critical media literacy is compelling as it did not have its own subject but it was visible everywhere to some extent. We did not have textbooks in all the subjects so I think this affected it when we had to look for study material from the Internet and various books. We printed them forward and shared these informations, which could have contradicted each other.” (Participant 4)

All participants mentioned how the amount of critical media literacy varied from subject to subject. The participants who chose classical sciences over humanities and social

sciences had fewer experiences of critical media literacy during their IB degree. According to the participants, history, economics, psychology and Finnish classes had most amount of critical media literacy embedded in the education after English. Some participants did not notice some IB classes consisted of critical media literacy without further prompting. Participant 10 initially expressed there was no need for critical media literacy in the Finnish classes as they primarily consisted of literature analysis and the ways how the students experienced the events of the books but once the participant discussed more about literature analysis, they noticed it was interlinked with critical media literacy:

“We went really into the depths of the text and we were considering what it might actually mean and what does it reflect, ah, of the society and culture as well, okay that is really critical indeed. Even though you didn’t take different kinds of point of views, you went still deep into the context and checking out what affected it the whole situation” (Participant 10)

The IB subjects were not the only aspect which had variation of the included amount of critical media literacy in the classroom. The amount of critical media literacy also varied from teacher to teacher as well. The teachers who were more interested in critical media literacy had more examples of the concept in their education as well. In addition, some participants stated the critical media literacy education was dependent on the teacher and their interests. Despite of this, several participants mentioned they preferred the pedagogical methods of their IB degree as the teachers did not solely teach about their subjects and topics but they required active participation from the students as well. For example, some stated how they felt the Finnish compulsory school system concentrates too much on memorising the information without understanding and criticising it. Many participants also said the pedagogical methods of the IBDP and the class structure supported the students to improve their criticality. As the participants had the same class during the IBDP, they stated the class atmosphere was safe enough for them to openly discuss and critique different ideas and arguments. In addition, the classes are not necessarily centred on the teacher as the classes may require active participation from the students, which improved the critical skills of the participants:

“In the IB programme, there is that certain group, that tight-knit group, so it [the class] was more unrestricted as well. You could go deeper with the discussion, we were critical and we were free to question and challenge and [...] it contributed to our learning of the class topics.” (Participant 8)

### **4.3 Theme 3: Further academic education**

#### **4.3.1 General information about the further education**

Some participants had completed their whole degree abroad and majority of the participants had worked or completed an academic exchange outside of Finland. The appendix table (Appendix 4) shows the variety of studied degrees of the participants. Some participants had studied more scientific subjects in their degrees whereas some participants had studied more humanistic or social science degrees.

#### **4.3.2 Critical media literacy and the further education**

The participants had differing opinions on how they have experienced the necessity and prevalence of critical media literacy in their degree. The participants who studied more classical sciences stated critical media literacy did not have a significant role in their degrees or assignments since according to these participants, it is relatively difficult to argue against the ideas of pure science where most questions and problems can be answered with yes or no answers. Some mentioned their pedagogical environment was not very flexible in terms of arguments or discussions, especially when the classes consisted of practical mathematics. For example, these participants stated there was very little room for having an ideology in engineering. Similarly, Participant 5 explained various medical procedures do not have any challenges to them and in her level, she was still learning the basics of how to care for general injuries and health problems. The medical degree also consisted of practical assignments and hence, the students did not

need critical media literacy when they practiced their assignments during their classes, especially as they were in the early years of their studies:

“Well, in the lectures they lecture about the topics and in tutorials, we go through those lecture topics and we have standardised care methods and we abide by them, [...] at this stage you have to receive the information, you cannot go solo in those tutorials.” (Participant 5)

However, critical media literacy still existed in some assignments and classes. For example, Participant 7 had a course in the end of her degree where the students were asked to come up with their own business ideas by analysing information of the given case:

“In the master’s level we had a course where they gave you 25 pages long case which you had to analyse and resolve, there were no right or wrong answers. ‘What should this company do’... I did really well and they were my favourite assignments during the whole university degree.” (Participant 7)

Even though, the assignment did not directly require the ideas of critical media literacy, the students were asked to come up with their own arguments and choose relevant and academic sources which would support these arguments. Hence, the students had to have various literacy and critical skills when they produced this assignment. Participant 7 also mentioned these types of assignments were generally more difficult for her classmates since they lacked the prior knowledge how to construct their arguments. In addition, Participant 5 mentioned some teachers wished for criticism and challenging arguments. For example, if a student had read about a new research about the chosen topic, they could express their ideas and criticism about the current methods and the teacher would debate these critiques in a practical manner. Hence, the classes of Participant 5 contained some ideas of criticality when the students were more familiar with the taught topics but as they were still in the first years of their degree, many students did not have the advanced level of information for debating the topics with their teachers. In comparison, other participants had more experiences on the necessity of critical media literacy in during their degree. Some stated it would be impossible to study their respective degree without the understanding of critical media literacy as the degree consisted of several types of

literary analysis. Some studied people and societies and the students had to be careful when, for example, analysing cultural primary sources. Critical media literacy was also necessary in terms of assignment and course grades. For example, Participant 9 had a mandatory academic writing course which required higher levels of critical media literacy skills if the student wished to receive higher grades. The course required students to thoroughly analyse the source and answer the course questions with a critical mind-set.

The critical media literacy was also more present in classes where the students were more familiar with each other and the classes had smaller number of students. Participants mentioned it was difficult to have a critical mind-set and use their critical media literacy skills during the lectures compared to smaller tutorials or group projects. Some participants also explored how it can be difficult to have engaging critical discussions about their opinions if the other students are not active during the class. Some participants said it was easier to critically debate and use critical media literacy skills during their IBDP years as they had a more comfortable atmosphere in the classroom and since they had the same classmates during the whole degree. Participant 3 said criticality was necessary in her degree but she still occasionally felt alone with her critical media literacy skills in the classroom if no one else wanted to speculate the given topic:

“They [classmates] did not stigmatise but some people raised their eyebrows because how can, what some respected researcher said, how can you question that.” (Participant 3)

Most participants expressed their critical media literacy skills had improved from their IB programme years to their academic degrees, even though some said their degree did not require them per se. Some participants were writing or had just published their own research and they thought critical media literacy skills were essential part of their work. Others stated critical media literacy skills were an integral part of their degree and hence, these participants had been able to constantly train them after graduating from the IB programme. Some participants said they had gathered life experience after completing their IBDP and hence, the IBDP and their university degree were not the sole reason for their improved critical media literacy skills. In addition, some also said they had forgotten the systematic tools how to critically analyse the media but their skills had generally

improved. Some participants said their critical media literacy skills helped them with grasping the taught material with less effort and look for counter-arguments to the studied topics. In addition, Participant 9 had understood the law and judicial system in a simpler manner prior to her law degree but after beginning her studies, she had learned how to criticise questionable laws:

“We have been taught a lot about how the law can be changed. And it is allowed to change laws, there can be many things wrong with them. [...] Before I used to be like ‘the law is the law’.” (Participant 9)

#### **4.4 Theme 4: Critical media literacy and other aspects of life**

##### **4.4.1 Working life**

Some participants already had personal experience working in their respective academic fields. Alternatively, some had gained information from their teachers or other professionals about the need for critical skill in their academic professions. Some participants noted criticality is important when dealing with different people or customers at their work. The customers could come to visit them with the most recent piece of information on a certain topic and some participants said they should keep up with the news and research so they can advise their customers with the most professional service. For example, Participant 10 worked in banking where cryptocurrencies are an ongoing topic. She had to constantly keep up with the news and look for latest information about the topic but remain critical about the provided evidence. She also mentioned this was essential for her, as otherwise she would not be able to keep up with their customers and the customers might change the assistant to someone who is able to provide better service. Participant 4 had similar experiences, even though she worked in a museum which is a completely different profession and working environment. She often had customers who wanted to assess the value of their possession for historical significance. In these cases, the museum workers had to be able to critically look through online information for the value assessment. The work place of Participant 4 had also conducted workshops and

exhibitions based on the ideas of critical media literacy and hence, the concept was fundamental in her work. Interestingly, two participants said critical media literacy had benefited them when they had applied for their jobs. Both mentioned this idea without further prompting or questioning as well. Both explained the concept helped them understand what their potential employer was looking for in their job advertisement:

“You had to be really able to read through that [job advertisement] and try and put together from the ad to [...] who are they gonna hire, what kind of candidates are they willing to go for.” (Participant 1)

“There was a lot of preliminary assignments, like write about this using their plan as a basis. I got praised for, in the interview they said how I didn’t just recite how many members they had or how many this or that. I had clearly thought about what they were looking for.” (Participant 6)

On the other hand, some participants stated critical media literacy was not essential in their work or they had not experienced situations where it was needed. Participant 3 expressed they were interested in the concept but it was difficult to use their critical media literacy skills at work. Participant 3 stated some of her colleagues had a very simplistic and unchallenging views of the world and it was easier to hide her opinions than openly discuss them as the colleagues were not interested in debating their ideas.

#### **4.4.2 Free time**

There were varying opinions and experiences on the necessity of critical media literacy in the free time of the participants. Some possessed a general curiosity towards the world and they preferred to use their critical media literacy skills in the free time. Other participants did not always practice their skills if the situation did not directly require it. Some participants had routines where they practiced their critical media literacy skills in a habitual manner.

They enjoyed consuming media which challenged their beliefs or where they could hear opposing arguments or constructive criticisms about different world events. Participant 1 enjoyed listening to different podcasts about the current world news and she also said this

free time activity was part of her “mindfulness routine”. Participant 4 consumed a television show which discussed conspiracy theories where the hosts try to prove the existence of aliens according to various historical and social events. Participant 4 stated this show was very controversial and used questionable media editing tactics to prove their hypothetical theories. For example, the show edited interviews of disagreeing academics and managed to make them sound like they agreed with these conspiracy theories. Participant 4 used this television show to manage her stress levels as the participant enjoys “screaming at the television” how the show cannot argue their theories with the use of baseless argumentation skills and unprofessional editing styles. Other participants discussed how the concept of critical media literacy has made them realise the underlying power structures and how certain stereotypes are constantly repeated in the mass media. Some participants mentioned this can be also a burden when they search for the problematic stereotypes from the mass media:

“Because I am writing my thesis, I think that it makes me even more conscious about the power structures and it has actually made me ponder how we should make better and more responsible entertainment for people. Why do we have to keep on repeating certain things, why do we consider them suitable for, I don’t know, action film or whatever.” (Participant 2)

“It does stand out to me when for example, all the Disney princesses are always super thin and you know, if they are a bit chubby, they are also kind of goofy.” (Participant 9)

Most commonly, participants mentioned their Facebook use when they discussed about the need for critical media literacy skills with a practical example in their free time. Some participants were concerned about the threats and issues to personal privacy and social security in the social media, especially Facebook. They stated they had restricted the amount of data they shared with other Facebook users or they were more careful what they posted in their Facebook profile. These participants were also concerned how careless other users can be when they share questionable news stories to Facebook. Some participants also said they are more likely to use content rather than produce it in Facebook. Participant 2 had created groups with different privacy settings where their personal posts are not visible to certain people. Participant 4 mentioned they did not wish to delete any friends who did not share the same ideology so the social bubble of Participant 4 would not diminish. Some participants had also decreased their use of

Facebook due to the increase in knowledge about the threats about fake news and issues to privacy:

“I do not put my own or especially others’ information or pictures there without their permission. In that way, it is limited what I put to Facebook. It is not like, in the past I was much more liberal what I posted, but with the increase in knowledge, I have limited my usage a lot.” (Participant 8)

As mentioned in the first theme of the analysis, some participants thought it was easier to forget these skills if no one demanded them or if the subject did not interest them enough. Some participants thought it requires less effort to apply the critical media literacy concept when it is part of a school or work assignment. However, these participants still argued that they do not necessarily stop using their critical media literacy skills, even though it requires more effort to use these skills in their free time. Alternatively, some participants also argued if people have learned the critical media literacy skills, they cannot turn them on and off when it pleases them. These participants stated that once they have learned to understand the world through the concept of critical media literacy, there is no desire to neglect the concept from their way of thinking:

“Yes, it is definitely a way of living or thinking, it influences, it is so firmly part of my worldview and way of thinking that it is not a switch I can turn on and off.” (Participant 8)

Some participants stated they are more comfortable using critical media literacy in their free time compared to their work or degree as their friends are more understanding and accepting of their point of views. Similarly, some participants stated they used their critical media literacy and general argumentation skills with their friends as they share an environment where they can openly argue their ideas:

“I don’t think that I ever drop critical thinking, me and my friends call each other those annoying feminists for example, whenever we go to parties because we start to talk about politics and stuff like that and no one, absolutely no one is interested. [...] Someone might say that I’ve lost something when someone tells me a joke and I can’t laugh at that because I think it is very discriminating or intimidating or something like that. But I just can’t, it is so much part of me today. (Participant 2)

## **5 Discussion**

This discussion chapter relates the findings in the analysis section to previous research. The discussion chapter will consider how critical media literacy scholars would agree with the information from the previous chapter.

The discussion is organised according to the thesis research questions. First, I will state the relevant research questions and discuss how participants would answer it and relate these answers to other researchers and scholars and how they would consider these statements.

### **5.1 Understanding of critical media literacy and its necessity in the current society and education**

The first question asked what the understanding of IBDP graduates was on critical media literacy and its necessity. The first sub-question investigated how critical media literacy can be related to the social awareness and global empowerment.

They could correctly define the meaning of the concept, although some definitions primarily concentrated on critical thinking and source analysis. Most participants said their learning continued after they completed the IBDP as they had gathered more practical life experiences to their technical understandings about the global world. Researchers and participants also stated critical media literacy cannot be learned at once in an educational course but the learning can also happen through life experiences outside of the educational setting (Kupiainen and Sintonen, 2009, 15; Aarsand and Melander, 2016, 20; Harshman, 2018, 107). Most participants said they cannot “turn off” their criticality and they often continue to critically evaluate media in their free time as well. Some researchers could say the understanding of the participants can be relatively advanced compared to their peers as their results found out many students never experienced critical media literacy education in any educational level. For example,

journalism students (Clark, 2013) and pre-service teachers (Robertson and Hughes, 2011) had their first experience of it in the university level since it was mandatory aspect of their university degree (Clark, 2013, 899).

Many researchers and participants considered critical media literacy is not an optional but a mandatory aspect of the globalising world, and they asserted traditional forms of literacy and learning are not enough for succeeding in this multimedia era (Kellner and Share, 2007, 68; Gainer, 2010, 364; Ivanovic, 2014, 441-442; Park et al, 2015, 833; Sebryuk, 2017, 694). In the current global societies, participants and researchers thought critical media literacy is an essential 21st century skill and it is needed outside of the educational world due to the increasing access and amount of technological use and media content (Gainer et al, 2009, 675; Choudhury and Share, 2012, 39; Kesler et al, 2016, 2). Media and technology are pervasive in the everyday lives of people and people may continuously consume various media contents via several technological platforms (Tisdell, 2008, 48; Gainer, 2010, 364; Morrell, 2014, 5; Harshman, 2018, 107). People might not question or limit their consumption and some can repeat or reproduce the harmful messages they learned from the media (Clark, 2013, 897; Kim, 2017, 199; Sebryuk, 2017, 697). Researcher articles confirm the importance of critical media literacy in education as it often provides knowledge how to protect oneself from exposure to harmful media messages such as negative stereotypes, 'fake news' and 'alternative facts' (Harshman, 2018, 115; Valtanen, 2018, 21). People also learn how to participate and represent themselves in the society and provide respect for others (Akar-Vural, 2010, 742; Hant, 2010, 43; Meehan et al, 2015, 85; Puchner et al, 2017, 32). Participants and researchers stated everyone should learn about critical media literacy and both concentrated on the well-being of the younger generations as they cannot as easily protect themselves from harmful information and they do not have the mechanisms to deal with the media overload (Aarsand and Melander, 2016, 20). Some graduates expressed discomfort how certain media images are constantly repeated; evil characters often possess certain socially undesirable characteristics or chubby female characters are often "sidekicks" who are clumsy and silly. Researchers have acknowledged this can be harmful for developing children and people in general as some can develop serious issues with their self-esteem and body image (Akar-Vural, 2010, 751; Kim, 2017, 208). They might grow up in an

environment where their skin and hair colour, body size and gender are socially devalued and underrepresented or even invisible (Alvermann and Hagood, 2000, 195; Gainer et al, 2009, 675; Gainer, 2010, 367; Hant, 2010, 42; Puchner et al, 2017, 25). Researchers stated this affects individual's appreciation for oneself and makes it more difficult to actively participate in the society and fight for their personal rights (Gainer, 2010, 364; Akar-Vural, 2010, 742). In addition, some people are not able to differentiate harmful and empowering messages from each other as many hegemonies are often socially normalised and unquestioned (Gainer et al, 2009, 675; Kesler et al, 2016, 4; Puchner et al, 2017, 25). Hence, critical media literacy education should be mandatory for everyone regardless of their age or hegemonic position in their societies (Ranieri and Fabbro, 2016, 475).

Researchers and most participants agreed that digital literacy is necessary for more advanced understanding of critical media literacy; if people can use ICT technologies, they have better access to different media sources (Kupiainen and Sintonen, 2009, 21; Tang and Chaw, 2016, 62). However, digital literacy does not necessarily require critical media literacy skills and vice versa. Some participants and researchers stated many younger children are digitally literate but they cannot critically evaluate the media (Ivanovic, 2014, 440; Harshman, 2018, 108). The ICT use is also integrated in the current education system in Finland; primary school assignments are often completed in the internet and they are often uploaded to different online platforms such as Google Drive, where the teacher can grade these assignments (Opetushallitus, 2014). Most participants and some researchers do not condemn the educational technology use but they find it problematic how people and especially young pupils are expected to use technology and media without providing them information on how to handle the critical issues of media. For instance, people could more critically examine media if they know how ICTs are constructed based on one's interests and internet history when they significantly modify the visible content such as personified advertisements (Gainer et al, 2009, 674; Rodesiler, 2010, 164). This can enforce their social bubbles despite of the better access to contrasting media messages. Similarly, they agreed media is not necessarily problematic per se, participants and researchers are more concerned about the media content and its powerful position in the society and hence, the person must understand how to consume and analyse it without causing harm to themselves or other people around them (Akar-Vural, 2010,

742; Robertson and Hughes, 2011, 38). Researchers and some participants argued internet and media users should be able to differentiate advertising and product placements from other media content as the capitalistic marketing mechanisms intentionally aim to affect behaviour of the consumers (Gainer et al, 2009, 674). Some participants and researchers agreed media can be empowering because people can raise awareness of their social issues with the better access (Tisdell, 2008, 64). Different nationalities can share their experiences with each other with the improved digital literacy skills and faster internet access. In the past, people were often limited to one source where they consumed their media and news, whereas one can simultaneously consume several sources from several countries (Clark, 2013, 894). However, some participants still warned that the reader should not assume every event has equal amount of space in the media reporting as some reporters can publish articles which gain more clicks and hits.

## **5.2 Critical media literacy in the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme**

The second research question asked how critical media literacy is visible in the IBDP and the sub-questions aimed to investigate how IBDP graduates learned the concept during the programme. From these experiences, I wanted to find out what kind of methods should educators implement when teaching the concept.

All participants conceptualised critical media literacy in the IBDP but some had started using their critical thinking skills prior to starting the degree. All the participants gained the systematic and practical skills how to interpret and decode different media forms and messages. This process followed very closely with the proposed pedagogical methods by several researchers (Alvermann and Hagood, 2000, 195; Akar-Vural, 2010, 743). The student should look for certain aspects from the source; what is the intended audience, what is the purpose, agenda, form and tone of the publication, where and when was it published, who published it, what is the style of linguistics and imagery, and who or what are invisible from the message and its values (Rodesiler, 2010, 165; Choudhury and Share, 2012, 39-40; Ivanovic, 2014, 440; Meehan et al, 2015, 84; Kesler et al, 2016, 4; Sebryuk, 2017, 699). Graduates said this method helped them to open any published

media as they could systematically and critically look for the main ideas. Some said they forgot these systematic tools after they graduated from the IBDP but their criticality still prevailed as many said it was not possible for them to turn off this type of skill from their regular activities. Some also said that even though they forgot these systematic tools, it did not reduce their critical media literacy skills, since they learned to think outside of the box and look for other affecting factors than going point by point and continuously analyse the same ideas each time. Hence, the participants also achieved the objectives of the IBDP and IBO for the “life-long learning” (Wells, 2011, 175). The participants learned to be reflective, attentive and responsible and they thought these traits were invaluable to them (Tarc and Beatty, 2012, 345; Alford et al, 2013, 3).

All participants agreed critical media literacy is an essential factor of the IBDP but the IBDP teachers implemented varying amounts of critical media literacy in their classes. Some researchers have stated this can be common in critical media literacy education as it is dependent on the teacher’s initiative (Ivanovic, 2014, 441). All the participants stated IBDP English classes were most saturated with the concept and its need in the English subject was followed by Finnish, history and psychology classes. Participants thought it would have been difficult to complete these subjects without the knowledge on critical media literacy. The IBDP English teacher explained he based his classes on multiple notable scholars of critical, feminist, cultural and communication theories, similarly to how the concept of critical media literacy is constructed (Alvermann and Hagood, 2000, 194; Garcia et al, 2013, 110; Kim, 2017, 199). In his classes, he first discussed the theory of the appropriate scholar and then based his exercises on their theories via everyday real-life examples. This is also the ideal way critical media literacy researchers and educators should teach the concept as these exercises might explain difficult and abstract theories with relatable and practical examples (Joanou, 2017, 40). The students could understand their hegemonic position in their respective societies and how certain physical or social traits can be beneficial (Akar-Vural, 2010, 751; Rodesiler, 2010, 166; Clark, 2013, 896; Ranieri and Fabbro, 2016, 474; Harshman, 2018, 113). Some participants noticed how hegemonies, inequalities and privileges were ingrained in the advertisement and popular media, and how these media messages affected their own behaviour and social interaction. Harshman (2018) discovered comparable results in his research as he

interviewed various IBDP teachers of different nationalities and subjects. These teachers used documentaries and films to highlight the relevant topics in relation to the global context and critical theory and these methods helped students to understand their social positions and privileges. For example, one teacher illustrated colonialism is not only a historical phenomenon but it is still happening in the current day (Harshman, 2018, 114). Some participants of the present study had similar experiences; they understood slavery, propaganda and nationalism are wide-spread and visible in the local and global context and they thought these lessons provided them invaluable information as well. Interestingly, the participants would disagree with Cole et al (2015) as the participants did not have notable experiences of critical media literacy in their TOK classes or they did not have significant memories about that subject. Several participants said there are individual differences between the teachers and their teaching methods, and some explained their TOK classes were rushed and even undervalued amongst all the other IBDP assignments and deadlines.

The participants of the present study highlighted IBDP also provided a safe environment to discuss their ideas, and they gained confidence to orally defend their point of views. Participants said one of the main reasons for this safer environment was the consistency and uniformity of the classroom; they said it was easier to argue with people they knew as they could predict their opinions before people said anything. Even though, this might not provide the most critical environment per se, it is a useful way to introduce students to new thinking and literacy models (Sebryuk, 2017, 699). Clark (2013, 897) stated it is easier to disclose one's personal perspectives and engage in a critical discussion with the people they trust. Some participants contrasted their IBDP experiences with their later life; some said they could not share their critical point of views in a reserved working environment whilst others said they enjoyed discussing critical matters with their like-minded friends.

Henceforth, participants and researchers had very similar ideas and opinions how to implement critical media literacy in the classes and curriculum. The class atmosphere should be open for opinions, discussion and debates and students should not be shamed for their ideas (Alvermann and Hagood, 2000, 199; Gainer, 2010, 372). The classes

should also teach how to improve the argumentation skills of the students and teachers should choose practical problems from the social setting and hegemony of the participants (Akar-Vural, 2010, 757; Harshman, 2018, 115). There are several ways how to design age-appropriate classes and teachers can implement critical media literacy in any educational or level by choosing the correct methods (Kellner and Share, 2007, 68; Robertson and Hughes, 2011, 48; Diergarten et al, 2017, 35; Kim, 2017, 209). In a study by Diergarten et al (2017, 33), the researchers created the term media sign literacy which can be an early form of critical media literacy, aimed for preschool and kindergarten children. The researchers found out young children can recognise common signs which are often applied in media messages. Kim (2017, 209-210) stated, it is possible to educate kindergarten children about critical media literacy via fairy tales and stories. In their study, the researchers discussed the gender roles of the chosen fairy tales and questioned why male and female characters had certain traits and characteristics which were often repeated. Participant 2 also mentioned this as a method to teach about the concept. Educators could discuss why Western fairy tales often reiterate certain moral lessons such as 'do not steal' and 'listen to your parents' and how these moral lessons could be linked to the surrounding cultures and traditions, where the teachings and values of Christianity are visible in the modern media culture. In general, the educator or teacher should provide analysis material from popular media which can be closer to the interests of the students (Kesler et al, 2016, 5; Ranieri and Fabbro, 2016, 469). Popular media is also highly influential amongst people, especially younger generations. Many people may imitate or model what they see in the media or popular figures such as singers or actors can be significant role models to many people. Participants and researchers requested the best exercises use films, children's programmes or stories, song lyrics or brand adverts which are significant and relatable in the cultural context of the students (Alvermann and Hagood, 2000, 203; Gainer et al, 2009, 676; Gainer, 2010, 372; Rodesiler, 2010, 164; Amory, 2011; Meehan et al, 2015, 85-86).

### **5.3 The relationship of International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme and critical media literacy in the further education**

The third and the last research question inquired the relationship between understanding of critical media literacy and the academic success. The sub-question continued to discover how is critical media literacy necessary in the further academic education.

Most participants and several researchers noted IBDP is useful in the further academic education as the programme structure, requirements and assignments corresponds to the studying in the university (Taylor and Porath, 2006, 154; Culross and Tarver, 2011, 237; Green and Vignoles, 2012, 482; Alford et al, 2013; Saavedra et al, 2014, 360; Fitzgerald, 2015, 28). Many said their first years in the university were straightforward and easy as initially, their degrees felt like an extension of their IBDP years. The EE assignment was also beneficial for most participants, especially if they chose an EE subject which was close to their future degree. Some could explore their potential interests or find their “calling” while others noticed their EE subject was not interesting enough and they should choose a different subject for their university major. The EE assignment structure also gave the tools to construct their first university assignments with minimal effort as they had already learned the ideal essay structures, argumentation methods and critical media literacy skills (Donahue, 2016, 66; Saavedra et al, 2016, 361). Their classmates had to learn skills and information which were natural to the present participants; they said it was natural for them to write longer essays as they had learned the essay structure and critical referencing in the IBDP. These ideas agree with the results of the studies by Culross and Tarver (2011), Donahue (2016), Tarc and Beatty (2012), and Saavedra et al (2016). They investigated how IBDP graduates valued their degree experience in the further education and their participants highlighted how the IBDP taught them invaluable tools which were essential part of the university education. Equivalently to the present IBDP graduates, their participants had learned to complete academic assignments, manage their time and critically evaluate the provided information without taking anything for granted. Both had also learned the appropriate oral skills to defend their own point but also accept the perspectives of other people by analysing the background of these perspectives and relating them to a social context.

Even though participants and researchers thought critical media literacy is fundamental part of the university education, it was often poorly implemented or it is completely non-existent from the curriculum as the teachers do not have the skills or resources to include it in their teaching (Kellner and Share, 2007, 67; Vesterinen, 2011, 28; Ivanovic, 2014, 441; Cole et al, 2015, 250). Some participants criticised the current teaching methods as they do not optimise the learning of critical media literacy and these opinions echo the previous research as well. Many considered the traditional teaching methods ineffective as they consist of teacher-centred monologues and they do not require active participation from the students (Akar-Vural, 2010, 744). Participant 2 expressed dissatisfaction with multiple-choice tests in one of her university courses. Multiple-choice tests are popular method for testing the students. In the United States, standardised tests are part of the general pedagogical methods of many schools and teachers with limited and reduced budgets (Meehan et al, 2015, 82). According to Kesler et al (2016, 22), standardised tests are the least useful method to teach critical media literacy as they do not test student's argumentation and thinking skills as they only require memorisation of the given course material. Researchers have proposed classroom setting should be modified to support development of critical media literacy skills (Akar-Vural, 2010, 743). The educators should highlight the significance of the critical media literacy in the society; Morrell (2014, 5) asserted students are more willing and interested in learning current ideas if their teachers demonstrate the relevancy of their class topics. However, many participants were dissatisfied with their university class environments and settings as their arrangement did not provide an ideal breeding ground for critical skills in general. Some said the class structures did not allow room for debates and their classmates were uncomfortable with oral argumentation. Some participants and researchers agreed that the educational environment should not penalise students for their opinions (Clark, 2013, 897). Before making the initial judgement, educators and classmates should understand contrasting opinions may originate from previous life experiences and they should allow room for differences instead of creating an atmosphere where everyone needs to agree with each other (Sebryuk, 2017, 699).

Some participants thought critical media literacy education is insufficient outside of the IBDP. Some never experienced how to use the concept in their university degree as some

degree or course leaders assumed students would possess the necessary critical media literacy skills. These participants mentioned they were lucky to graduate from the IBDP as their classmates struggled with critical tasks which were natural for the participants. There were also differences in the university degrees or teaching methods; critical media literacy was integrated in some degrees or courses while it was non-existent in others (Kellner and Share, 2007, 67). Similarly, to the research by Ivanovic (2014, 441), the requirements of the teachers also varied as some teacher required the concept during their classes or assignments but some degrees did not have uniformed plans about how and whether the concept should be included in the education. Some participants of the present study said some university courses did not have an open atmosphere where students could actively participate in the class discussions and debates since these classes consisted of the traditional teaching methods where the teacher lecture about the topic without further questions.

#### **5.4 Limitations and future research**

The present research used the critical media literacy concept without extensive critique and some researchers have criticised the concept for its narrow ideas and definitions (Kline, 2016; Mason, 2016). However, these critiques forget to bear in mind that many critical media literacy theorists and educators suggest teaching the concept alongside with other relevant concepts and theories. The concept should be integrated and accordingly applied to all the school subjects. Most critique concentrates on the concept's narrow view on the significance of the medium. Many critical media literacy researchers consider the role of the medium in their analysis such as why was the media published as an advert in the newspaper rather than commercial in the television (Alvermann and Hagood, 2000; Akar-Vural, 2010; Choudhury and Share, 2012; Fedorov and Levitskaya, 2016; Diergarten et al, 2017; Harshman, 2018). The participants of the current research also discussed the importance of the medium and the form of the media technology. For instance, some said media published in a traditional medium reaches different audience compared to modern medium.

The participants of the current study self-evaluated their skills, which can be unreliable method if they overestimate or underestimate themselves. In the future research on critical media literacy, the researchers should study the concept in a classroom setting or test the skills with practical examples. The researchers could provide their participants with examples from the popular media or advertising and urge them to analyse these examples. However, researchers should note that this type of research design have problems as well since some participants might not perform well in a research setting where the researchers demand results from them.

There are some limitations with the chosen research methods and methodology. This research used qualitative methods and the results cannot be directly generalised even though they were often linked to previous research. Ruusuvuori and Tiittula (2005, 23) have expressed the researcher always makes their own interpretation and understanding when transcribing the interviews. Hence, there is a possibility that some discussed ideas were misinterpreted by me as the researcher. Some interviews were conducted in Finnish and some data could have been misinterpreted in the translation process, if the analysis included the direct quotes from these translated interviews. However, this is not a significant limitation per se, as Ruusuvuori and Tiittula (2005, 51) have also stated qualitative research methods are based on interaction where it is impossible to be neutral and avoid misinterpretations.

There can also be differences between the experience of the IBDP students and Finnish national high school students and future researchers should create a wider-scale study and research these two groups. Some participants stated they had experienced situations (e.g. university group-work and proofreading) where they noticed other students lacked media literacy skills the participants assumed as the norm. Alternatively, future research should also focus on the relationship between the IBDP and critical media literacy so the future IBDP educators and workers could improve the curriculum to include more mandatory classes on the concept, especially as it is not mentioned anywhere in the IBDP curriculum or syllabi.

Readers should note that all the participants were from relatively privileged backgrounds as they had completed the IB programme and had continued to further education. Some researchers have stated critical media literacy education can be crucial for minority groups for empowering them (Tisdell, 2008, 63). Future researchers could consider the students of some minority groups in Finland and how they understand the necessity of critical media literacy in education and other various social contexts. Future researchers should also determine the distinction between empowering and harmful media content so the teachers would not cause unnecessary distress to their students in their classes (Gainer, 2010, 372). In addition, the media should be interesting and relatable but teachers should not choose the material based on its entertainment value as the critical media literacy classes should still concentrate on the education, and the development of different critical and literacy skills (Tisdell, 2008, 64; Gainer et al, 2009, 681).

## **5.5 Conclusion**

The IBDP graduates agreed critical media literacy is an essential factor in the IBDP but there are differences on its necessity according to subjects and teachers. All the participants first learned the concept in the IBDP where they gained the systematic tools to deconstruct and analyse the media. These IBDP graduates had an exceptional opportunity since many other students never experience critical media literacy in education, especially before they go to a university. Participants expressed critical media literacy education should be mandatory as it is useful in the further education. Most participants stated the concept helped with their university studies, since they already possessed skills how to create critical assignments or argue and debate their ideas to other people. They also agreed with the teaching methods; it is easier to internalise the concept of critical media literacy via examples from the popular media or relatable real-life examples. If future educators wish to implement critical media literacy in their pedagogical methods, they should choose material which is interesting to their students. For instance, the students could analyse the lyrics of their favourite artists or the teacher could choose a documentary or a film which discusses the taught topic in relation to the global context. Furthermore, IBDP graduates considered critical media literacy is a

valuable life skill outside of the educational setting. Some participants had a greater necessity for critical media literacy skills in their professions or academic degrees or they were generally interested in the concept in their free time. The participants thought there is a need for critical media literacy in the current society and the educational curriculums should reflect this need as well. The teachers can include critical media literacy education in their classes by designing age-appropriate class content; this way critical media literacy can be a mandatory aspect in any educational level.

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# **Appendix**

## **Appendix 1 - Recruitment letter**

### **Critical media literacy among International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme graduates**

My name is Mona Eskelinen and I am a master's student from the Faculty of Education at Lapland University. The name of my degree is media education. As a part of my degree course, I am undertaking a research project for my Master's thesis. The title of my project is: Experiences of the critical media literacy in the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) and its usefulness in the further academic education.

This study will explore experiences about how the IBDP taught about the concept of critical media literacy and how this concept is useful in further education. This research can provide valuable information as there are no previous research conducted on critical media literacy and the IBDP.

I am looking for volunteers to participate in the project. Participants who graduated from Lyseonpuiston lukio and are currently studying or have studied in a university are welcomed to be part of my research. You should also have sufficient skills in either English or Finnish for communication. The interviews can be conducted in either language. I will ask all the questions in English but I can translate them whenever necessary.

If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to take part in a single interview session with the researcher. The whole procedure should take no longer than 1 hour altogether. I will use a tape recorder to record the interview. You are free to withdraw from the study at any stage during the interview without giving any reasons, and it will not affect your treatment. Once the interview is finished you have two more weeks to consider your participation. However, it is not possible to withdraw after two weeks as I

will have started creating the interviews transcripts and analysing the data. You also have the right not to answer any questions which you might find too sensitive. Besides this consent form, I do not require any other forms of information from you to conduct my study.

The interview can be done in the chosen location such as Lapland University or via online communication tools such as Skype. I will arrange the interview at a safe environment that will ensure confidentiality such as private study rooms in the university or the library.

All data will be anonymised as much as possible. Your name will be replaced with a pseudonym, and it will not be possible to identify you from any reports of the gathered data. All data collected will be kept in a secure place to which only I have the access as the researcher. These will be kept until the end of the examination process of May 2018, and then all the data and tapes that could identify you will be destroyed.

The results may be published in a journal or presented at a conference.

If you would like to contact an independent person, who knows about this project but is not directly involved in it, you are welcome to contact Mari Maasilta. She is one of the main professors in Media Education master's degree and she works as the instructor for this thesis. Her contact details are given below in a debriefing form that will be provided for you.

If you have read and understood this information sheet, all your possible questions have been answered, and you would like to be a participant in the study, please see the consent form below.

## **Critical media literacy among International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme graduates**

I have read and understood the information sheet and this consent form. I have had an opportunity to ask questions about my participation.

I understand that I am under no obligation to take part in this study.

I understand that I have the right to withdraw from this study within two weeks without giving any reasons.

I agree to participate in this study.

Name of participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Contact details of the researcher

Name of researcher:	Mona Eskelinen
Address:	Yliopistonkatu 8 96300 Rovaniemi
Email / Telephone:	mona.eskelinen@gmail.com / 0504128422

## Appendix 2 - Debriefing Form

Dear Participant,

This interview aimed to look at the experiences about the critical media literacy in the IBDP and further education. Some previous researchers have noted the critical media literacy can be necessary for succeeding in the university. The IBDP is also interested in similar concepts such as critical thinking and source analysis which can aid the students when they continue to higher levels of education. The study is only interested in your ideas and experiences and there were no right or wrong answers in the interview. This study was created as a part of the master's degree of media education in Lapin yliopisto. The degree is a two-year long programme where media, technology, education and pedagogy are main focuses of the programme.

Before the interview, I stated there was no possibility of deception or intentional harm. All the questions I asked in my interview were genuine and part of my research. In addition, your identity will be kept anonymous during the whole research.

However, if you felt offended or negatively affected at any part of the research, I have provided my supervisor's information in case you want to contact her. I have also provided my own information below if you have any further questions or problems. As stated before, you have two weeks to withdraw from the study in case you feel you enclosed information you do not wish to be published. If you do not want to withdraw but you feel that some of the questions were too personal, you can also request that some of your answers will not be analysed. Once I will start decoding and analysing the interviews, withdrawing will be impossible because the information will be anonymous and in a different format.

Thank you for taking part to my research, your help was appreciated.

Name of researcher:   Mona Eskelinen           Email: [mona.eskelinen@gmail.com](mailto:mona.eskelinen@gmail.com)  
Name of supervisor:   Mari Maasilta           Email: [mari.maasilta@ulapland.fi](mailto:mari.maasilta@ulapland.fi)

## **Appendix 3 - Interview Schedule**

### **Research focus: Critical media literacy among International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme graduates**

I have used some previous research articles for generating this interview schedule such as studies by Taylor and Porath (2006), Hautamäki et al (2012), Cole et al (2015) and Tang and Chaw (2016). I have applied questions or statements in relation to my thesis objectives and interests. It is not necessary to ask all the presented questions and some work as guidelines for the following interview content. The interviews are conducted using the open-ended interview method and there is no strict structure on the order of the questions or topics.

### **Objectives**

- My thesis is mainly interested in the IBDP, further education and critical media literacy and how these experiences and concepts relate to each other or how they benefit from each other
- Hence, I initially want to explore participants' experiences about their time in the IBDP and after the programme when they continued further with their studies
- Then I wish to understand what they understand by the term 'critical media literacy' (CML) as I ask my participants to define the term for me. Once they have given their own understanding and reflection, I provide the participants with the actual definition
- Once we have fully covered this definition and I can be sure they comprehend the term to some extent, I will explore how the concept of CML has been present in their studies, if at all. The lack of CML does not prohibit my participants from taking part in my study as this aspect may also provide some valuable insight
- I am interested if the participants applied CML during their IBDP studies and whether this benefitted them (e.g. better grades, better argumentation and

debate skills) or if CML also had any negative traits (e.g. greater workload and uncertainty with the stated facts)

- Similarly, to the former objective, I will explore the effect of CML in their further studies. For example, if the participant agrees the IBDP taught them CML skills and these were beneficial for them, did they feel they were able to manage their studies in the further education in a more efficient manner. I will also explore if CML together with IBDP had any negative aspects to their further education.
- more questions can be asked according to the content of the answers to gain deeper understanding of the perceptions and experiences

## **I: Present circumstances and General experiences**

### 1. General information

- a. Age
- b. IBDP graduation year
- c. Education status (year, name of the university, name of the degree, possible graduations)
- d. Possible profession

### 2. IBDP

- a. Why was IBDP chosen instead of the general high school programme
- b. Feelings about the programme - any pros and cons
- c. Feeling about the graduation
- d. Assignments - EE, CAS, IAs, TOK

### 3. Further education

- a. How the study place was chosen
- b. Possible difficulties or benefits when applying for the university and degree
- c. Experiences about further education
- d. Pros and cons of continuing from IBDP to further academic education
  - i. Does the programme provide any skills for continuing to further education? If so, which ones?

- ii. How should the IBDP programme be changed so it would be more beneficial in further education?

## **II: Critical media literacy**

### 1. Defining the term

- a. Before I will give the full definition for the concept, I will ask my participants to define the idea for me in their own words and what it means for them.
- b. Explain the term according to critical media literacy scholars
- c. Fake news, alternative facts... Current topic in the society? Is there a greater need for it when more material and information is available to great amount of people around the world?
- d. How can it be related to other concepts?
- e. Can CML be optional?
- f. Is there way to improve the CML skills? How can they be improved?

### 2. ICT skills

- a. How can better understanding of various technological and media tools improve the critical media literacy skills?
- b. Do you know about the possible risks and dangers of the ICT tools?
- c. Which ICT skills do you have for educational purposes?
- d. How can ICTs benefit learning?
- e. How can ICTs hinder learning?

### 3. Educational context

- a. How can people learn or teach about critical media literacy? How can teacher teach these skills for the 'first-timers'?
- b. Can critical media literacy skills enhance the learning experiences?

### 4. Source analysis

- a. What is understood by the idea?
- b. What is considered to be good/bad source according to the participants?
- c. How do you find sources for work or school related projects?

- d. Do you consider how the agenda of the writer or the publisher can affect discourse of the article?
- 5. The participant
  - a. Do you think you possess good CML skills? Why? Why not? Are you more inclined to believe something when it benefits you? If so, why do you think this is the case?

### **III: The IBDP and Critical Media Literacy**

- 1. General information
  - a. How did the IBDP teach these skills? How did it not?
  - b. Where did the participants look for sources for their IB assignments?
  - c. How are the sources chosen for different assignments?
- 2. Necessity in the IBDP for Critical media literacy
  - a. Assignments
  - b. Class structures
  - c. Final exams
- 3. Pedagogical philosophies of the IBDP
  - a. Critical thinking: How did critical thinking affects the performance in the classroom setting or assignments? Was critical thinking discussed and highlighted in the classes?
  - b. Global citizenship: How is it related to critical media literacy?
  - c. Theory of Knowledge: How is CML necessary in ToK classes and assignments?
  - d. Assignments: Can students obtain high grades without CML?
- 4. Possible relations and similarities between CML and IBDP
- 5. Future of the education
  - a. How is CML necessary in the high school level? What is the age when critical media literacy and similar concepts are easier to grasp?
  - b. Other suggested ideas to develop a more critical education system

#### **IV: Further education and Critical Media Literacy**

1. General Information
  - a. Where do/did the participants look for sources for their assignments?
  - b. How are/were the sources chosen for different assignments?
  - c. How have these formerly stated skills (d)evolved since the IBDP?
2. Necessity of critical media literacy in the further education
  - a. Assignments
  - b. Classes
3. Benefits of Critical Media Literacy in Further Education
4. Follow up question to all the former ones in this section; to what extent does the IBDP experience contribute to these critical skills, ideas and knowledge? When did they start understanding CML for the first time?
5. Future
  - a. After degree graduation - will CML benefit them when they complete their degree?
  - b. What kinds of benefits does CML have outside of the educational world
    - i. In the working life, if applicable
    - ii. In the free time when consuming different media forms and using technologies
  - c. OR, do they even use these skills outside of the educational world? Is it easy to apply ideas of CML when the people use ICTs for fun and leisure? Do people critique statements, sources etc. when the teacher is not present?

#### **V: Concluding remarks and debrief**

1. Anything I might have missed
2. Anything discussed but not fully explored or anything the participant would like to add
3. Ensure confidentiality and explaining how data will be used

4. Confirming that none of the answers are too personal, otherwise taking these responses away from the script
5. Accessing information, support, and help, if necessary
6. Thanking my participants

#### Appendix 4 - Participant information

Participant no.	Academic degree(s)	Profession
1	Business and administration	Market manager
2	Literature	Freelance journalist
3	Social work	Social worker (past)
4	Social science	Museum worker
5	Medicine	N/A
6	Theology (completed) Social work (current)	Church worker
7	Engineering	N/A
8	Engineering	Informatics
9	International relations and law	N/A
10	Commerce	Bank worker

## Appendix 5 - The International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme model for the subjects

(Source: International Baccalaureate. (no year). Diploma Programme model - Logos and programme models. *IBO.org*. Accessible at: <http://www.ibo.org/digital-toolkit/logos-and-programme-models/>. [Last Accessed: 21st of April 2018].)

