

INTRODUCTION

Today, we access information whose source is not always verified, often accompanied by emotional tones that risk manipulating our beliefs and choices. The need to develop tools that help decode reality by applying a critical thinking methodology has become increasingly evident in recent years.

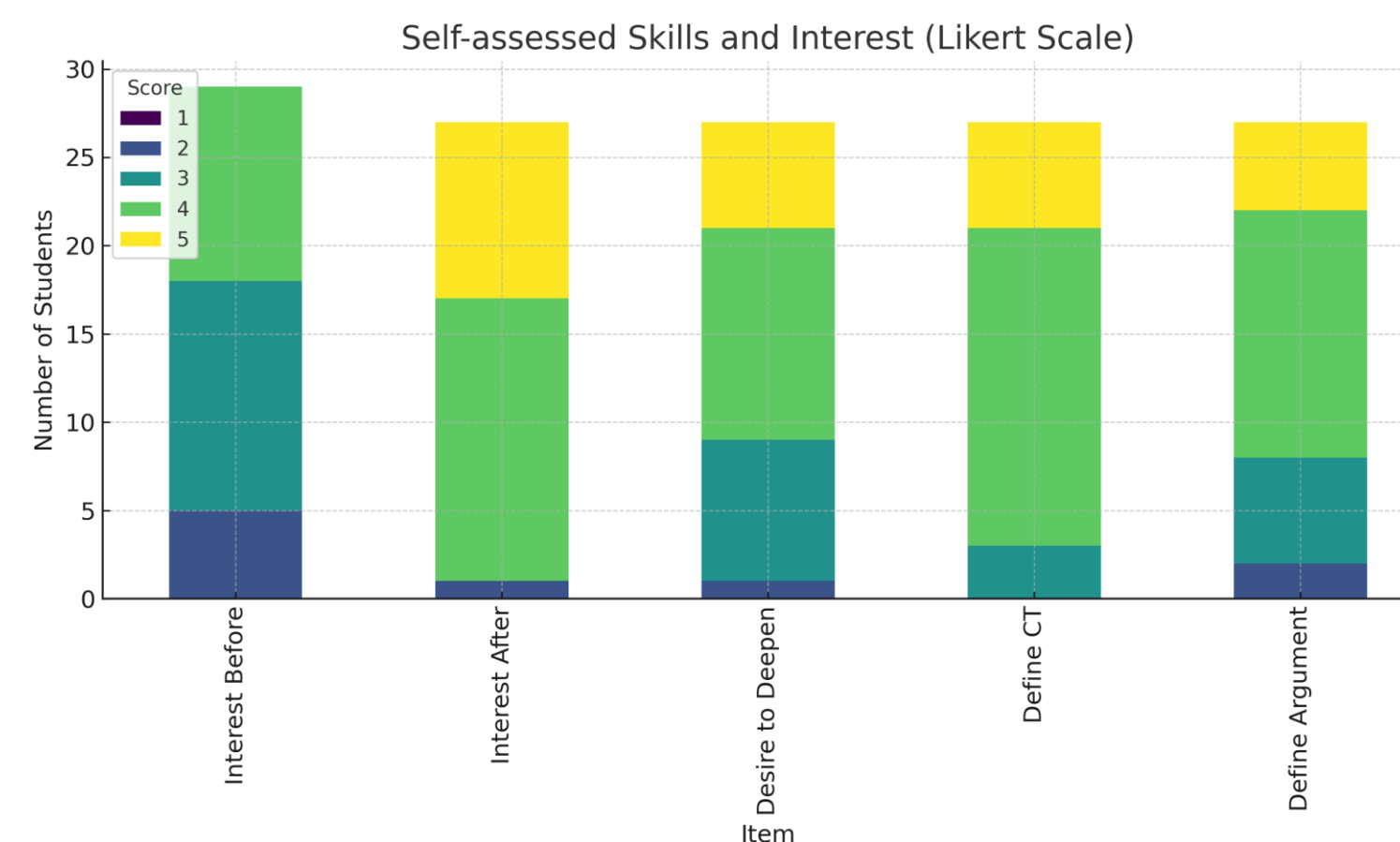
CRITICAL THINKING can be defined as the ability to think rationally, explore questions and ideas, and understand the logical connection between them before accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion, learning to use information, observation, experience, and rationality rigorously and skillfully to guide choices, decisions, and beliefs. We introduced an elective course in "Critical Thinking" within the palliative care teachings in the degree course in nursing sciences at our university to provide tools for reflection and understanding on the issues of health, emotions of patients and caregivers, choices related to the care, and end of life. At the end of the course, a questionnaire was administered to highlight the interest aroused and the perceived usefulness of the course.

METHODS

The elective course in critical thinking involved 29 students. The course contained a theoretical part about the characteristics of argumentation, inductive and deductive reasoning, logical fallacies, and cognitive distortions, and an experiential part with class and individual group activity to exercise critical thinking on images, texts, and situations to develop the ability to observe, ask questions, consider different points of view, reason based on evidence, make connections and understand complexity. The exercises were developed on topics relating to hospital situations, the emotions of patients and caregivers, freedom of choice, and the right and duty of care. After the end of the elective course, we administered a questionnaire to students to fill in anonymously, containing also a self-assessment of the level of knowledge acquired on critical thinking, on the perceived usefulness in their training, with an evaluation expressed on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, and two open questions on the impact of this course on their expectations and on their professional future. 27/29 questionnaires were filled in.

RESULTS

The population consisted of 17 female and 10 male students, none of them knew what critical thinking is, nor had ever attended a course or lessons on critical thinking. The interest in the course changed after participating, going from a prevalence of low-moderate to moderate/high interest with a desire to delve deeper into the topic. Most students expressed a good level of confidence on all the explored items (ability to define critical thinking, its goals, to define an argument, a logical fallacy, a cognitive distortion, to ask questions, to consider different points of view, to be able to reason based on evidence, to grasp the focus of a complex phenomenon). The course was perceived as very useful or extremely useful in most cases. The qualitative assessment carried out on the open questions revealed the acquired awareness of one's cognitive biases and the need to recognize them to avoid being influenced. The importance of verifying information in order to reason critically and make rational choices based on facts was also understood. The ability to analyze situations considering different points of view was perceived as stimulating also in the professional activity.



critical making
rational
thinking
reflection
perspective
analysis
complexity
empathy
bias
verification
awareness
decision information emotions

CONCLUSIONS

The participation of students in the discussions during the theoretical part and in the exercises proposed in class was very high, with expressions of appreciation of equal degree that were confirmed in the questionnaires. This data, together with that relating to the interest in the methodologies of critical thinking, confirms that students feel the need to question themselves and to be guided in reflecting on sensitive issues, to find tools to think critically, especially in the professional field when they will face complex clinical situations, where being able to consider different points of view and to grasp the essence can prove to be a crucial skill.