# THE ROLE OF MEDIA LITERACY IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

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**Abstract.** Introducing and incorporating media literacy (ML) into language education, particularly foreign language teaching is a challenging task in the modern education arena. Nevertheless, it is highly crucial to integrate media literacy instruction into the curriculum to foster students' analytical thinking skills and help them internalize the various codes of the modern media system. By focusing on the perspectives, roles and instructional practices of teaching media literacy in foreign language education, this study aims to explore how the teaching of ML manifests itself in the classroom of English language. By employing semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and document analyses (analyzing subject curriculum, calendar thematic planning as well as the mid-term and short term lesson plans) with grade 9 as well as their teachers, this qualitative study aimed to examine "English as a Foreign Language" (EFL) teachers' opinions on media literacy education and the degree to which it is practiced in their classroom environment. Thus, the study revealed that teachers in Kazakhstan believe that media literacy is not considered a mandatory part of school curriculum. Furthermore, this study indicated that the education system in Kazakhstan needs to provide teachers and students with the necessary instruments (both physical and methodological) to introduce a quality media literacy education in Kazakhstani schools in an effective way.

**Key words:** English as a foreign language, media literacy, classroom practice, training, outcomes, language skills, challenges, perspectives

## Basic provisions

Media literacy incorporation is the movement to teach students using media accurately and distinguishing fake information from the valid one. Media literacy has quickly established itself as a set of necessary learning skills in K-12 curricula, but there are significant regional differences in how media literacy is implemented. According to the literature, one of the most intriguing questions related to media literacy education has been how media should be taught in educational settings. There have been ongoing discussions among scholars and educators about the historical development of media literacy since its emergence in the early 20th century. They focused on figuring out at what grade levels it should be taught, how it should be assessed, and whether media literacy should be taught as a stand-alone subject or as a cross-curricular subject.

## Introduction

An essential part of school education and lifelong learning is media literacy. It is a new development that ensures quality education [1]. However, in Kazakhstan, media literacy is still a relatively new concept that is hardly taught in schools. Therefore, this

paper discusses media literacy in Kazakhstan's education system, focusing on the EFL classroom [2]. This study used semi-structured interviews in a qualitative research design to explore the opinions of EFL teachers about media literacy education and the extent to which it is practiced in their classrooms.

Two research questions guided this study:

What do EFL teachers think about media literacy in the classroom?

What does media literacy look like in a EFL setting?

Despite the encouraging results of media literacy and the growing need to incorporate it into the educational system, there are still barriers to its development, especially at the level of classroom practice [2].

Over the years, schools have barely appreciated students' exposure to popular culture and have even advocated its rejection because it is inappropriate and harmful. According to Hobbs, teachers have a poor opinion of how media affects teaching and learning. However, scholars such as Buckingham, Jenkins, and others believe that the problem of discrepancy in media and technology use should be addressed primarily through education. The goal of integrating media literacy is to incorporate students' out-of-school experiences with popular culture into the classroom.

It is intended to provide a comprehensive framework for fostering individuals' critical and creative abilities and for providing judicious and informed access to a variety of media. Students' awareness and enjoyment of mass media are continually increasing through the teaching of media literacy and the promotion of its use in formal and informal education. Students' ability to fully participate in society as critical consumers and active producers is enhanced through media literacy.

Media literacy experts emphasized the important impact that media literacy has when it is included in the core curriculum. For example, media literacy is cited by Buckingham as an integral and motivating component of the current curriculum. According to the researcher, media literacy advocates have often called for its inclusion in all curriculum subjects. In addition, Hobbs asserts that media literacy can be used in any subject area and at all grade levels.

Other proponents of this cross-curricular approach believe that incorporating media literacy into other subjects can help students better understand and engage in media activities, even if the teacher does not have the necessary qualifications and experience. According to Hobbs, this inclusion improves the overall teaching and learning process. The main goal of incorporating media literacy into the classroom is to improve students' cognitive and critical thinking skills. It is important to talk about media literacy in the language classroom because cognition and language development are closely related [3].

It is believed that integrating media literacy into the foreign language classroom is crucial to increase language input and improve learners' comprehension. According to Hobbs (2004), English schools and departments were the first to promote the study of mass media beginning in the 1960s. To improve students' fluency and language production, English teachers should go beyond the usual teaching patterns and introduce innovative teaching activities. Students are generally more motivated to learn language skills when they are asked to recall their media encounters in the school

context.

In addition, the use of media literacy exercises in the English classroom allows teachers to more accurately assess their students' abilities in areas such as comprehension, vocabulary development, and speaking. For example, most students are more reluctant and have less confidence when asked to communicate in a language other than their native language, such as English. According to Masterman, incorporating media literacy into the English classroom promotes student engagement and participation by allowing students to use familiar media content to express themselves as proactive, independent, and responsible agents [4].

**Materials and methods**

This section addresses the research methodology that was used to collect and analyze the research data. First, the general research design is described, including the sampling procedure, research site, and data collection instruments.

The qualitative interviews used in this study aimed to understand the different viewpoints of EFL teachers regarding media literacy and the primary ML instructional techniques. Leavy explains that semi-structured interviews provide the researcher with a high degree of comparability of data and lead to greater respondent participation and engagement [3].

Respondents were asked to provide informed consent before the interviews began, explaining the importance of their contribution to the research project. Some teachers immediately agreed to answer the questions. Others were hesitant to participate in the interviews but eventually agreed. Thus, interviews were conducted with 12 EFL teachers. All of the interviewees were secondary English teachers. There were 6 females and 6 males in the 12-member sample.

12 EFL teacher interviews were conducted, and all interview transcripts were entered into Microsoft Word. Each interview question was then analyzed in more detail. Analysis of the interview questions focused on coding and categorizing the data patterns to find common themes.

**Results**

This section presents the results of the study that aimed to investigate the understanding and practices of EFL teachers in using media literacy in secondary schools in Kazakhstan. The findings that emerged from the data collected in the interviews are presented in the form of themes that correspond to the questions that guided this study. Two themes emerged as a result of the thematic data analysis: EFL Teachers' beliefs about media literacy and functions of media literacy in EFL.

Data analysis was conducted in two interrelated phases: a) ongoing data analysis occurred in parallel with data collection, i.e., reading and reflecting on the data while the first interview and observation were conducted; b) more in-depth analysis of the data occurred after all interviews and observations were conducted. Thus, the data obtained through the interviews were transcribed, read, and coded in order to organize them into themes using thematic analysis. In this sense, Cresswell emphasizes the role of coding as a process of marking the text to form descriptions and comprehensive

themes [4]. Therefore, we used coding to analyze and interpret the data obtained to identify broader themes in line with the research questions. In analyzing the data, we considered several factors that could potentially influence the data, such as the teachers' media literacy background, their prior experience with media literacy, and their years of teaching experience. In this way, we were able to identify common patterns in teachers' responses related to their background.

A total of twelve EFL teachers were interviewed using a qualitative approach, with their names changed to codes to preserve their identity. Respondents were first asked if they were familiar with the terms "media literacy" and "media education" The vast majority of respondents answered in the affirmative. Some respondents gave their explanations, referring to the impact of globalization, new media, and digital culture, and the need for a new approach to education. They asserted that media literacy is a prerequisite for 21st century learning skills that the general public, especially children and young people, need to acquire in order to deal with the problems brought by current media.

Another four teachers noted that the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) in the classroom by both teachers and students has something to do with media literacy. This was followed by a question aimed at finding out English teachers' opinions on government initiatives to promote media literacy in the education system. The majority of respondents agreed that media literacy is still mainly a concept used only in theory and not in practice. According to other teachers, literacy in Kazakhstan is still defined as the ability to read and write, and teaching is still done using traditional methods. On the other hand, another group of teachers confirmed the Ministry's clear efforts in this area.

These teachers were particularly supportive of expanding the use of ICT in teaching and learning. The teachers were then asked how they viewed media literacy as a cross-curricular topic from the perspective of the curriculum EFL. All teachers agreed that some sections and courses on media are included in secondary English textbooks. Some respondents said that these media lessons are mainly aimed at teaching students media and language related to new technologies. In addition, more than half of the respondents said that media education follows a protectionist strategy by emphasizing the risks and disadvantages of media in the curriculum EFL.

Some teachers claim that the emphasis in the English textbook is on teaching students the idea that the media is never objective and is always used to convey certain ideas. The curriculum does not allow students to use media materials to develop critical thinking skills and raise awareness of the information they are constantly receiving, according to the majority of EFL teachers.

The second part of the survey dealt with the teaching of media literacy in the classes of EFL. Most teachers felt that media literacy can be achieved with sufficient effort despite its absence in the Kazakh education system:

In a sense, teachers themselves can decide to implement media literacy activities in the classroom, creating an environment where students are active participants rather than passive recipients of information. (Teacher A)

Among the methods teachers use to teach media literacy in English class are

playing English music in the classroom, working on printed articles and encouraging students to write their own articles, and discussing TV programs. However, they said they do not get together often. Only one teacher admitted that she often uses songs to teach vocabulary. She went on to say that when a teacher shifts from typical traditional teaching methods to new methods such as using media, students become more engaged in the lesson.

However, other teachers stated that they stick to the material in the textbook and use standard teaching strategies. These teachers stated that while they do not object to media literacy interventions, they require specialized training in addition to the necessary tools. In general, most teachers agreed that it is very important to include media literacy exercises in the classroom because they encourage students to learn and improve their language skills, especially speaking, listening, reading, and writing in the foreign language classroom.

In addition, participants were asked to list the most important goals of media literacy education. Teachers agree that incorporating media literacy into the classroom EFL helps to keep students engaged and motivated to learn. Teachers believe that children need innovative teaching and learning strategies that are different from the traditional methods they are used to. According to respondents, integrating media literacy improves classroom dynamics and helps students achieve higher academic goals. This is evident from one teacher's response, "I often ask my students for their opinions on a program from TV, a movie they just watched, or any other material that helps them speak English in class. I am impressed when I see how engaged my students are in conversation despite occasional mistakes."

Teachers claim that fostering media literacy in their students contributes to their ability to think critically and creatively. In fact, critical thinking remains at the heart of media literacy education. It aims to develop students' abilities to use media intelligently and independently, and to understand, analyze, interpret, and evaluate the various meanings that media can convey. Conversely, communicative and productive skills support students' participation in social, cultural, and intellectual life. Overall, the next table demonstrates the general findings of the present research based on the themes emerged.

Table 1 - General findings

| *EFL Teachers' beliefs about media literacy* | *Functions of media literacy in EFL* |
|---|---|
| 1. It is a skill that gained significance due to the impact of globalization, new media, and digital culture, and the need for a new approach to education. | 1. Incorporation of media literacy into the classroom of EFL helps to keep students engaged and motivated to learn. |
| 2. It is a prerequisite for 21st century learning skills that the general public, especially children and young people, need to acquire in order to deal with the problems brought by current media. | 2. Students need innovative teaching and learning strategies that are different from the traditional methods they are used to. One of them is media-based teaching. |
| 3. It is still mainly a concept used only in theory and not in practice. | 3. Integrating media literacy improves classroom dynamics and helps students achieve higher academic goals. |
| 4. It is the ability to read and write, and teaching is still done using traditional methods. | 4. Fostering media literacy in students contributes to their ability to think critically and creatively. |
| 5. Media lessons are mainly aimed at teaching | 5. Media literacy in EFL aims to develop students' |

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|---|---|
| students media and language related to new technologies.<br>6. Media education follows a protectionist strategy by emphasizing the risks and disadvantages of media in the curriculum EFL. | abilities to use media intelligently and independently, and to understand, analyze, interpret, and evaluate the various meanings that media can convey. Conversely, communicative and productive skills support students' participation in social, cultural, and intellectual life. |

Another question focused on what teachers see as the main barriers to integrating media literacy into Kazakhstan's education system in general and EFL in particular. Teachers agreed that the main obstacle to teaching media literacy in Kazakh schools is the lack of resources and learning materials. They argued that the lack of technical resources hurts educational institutions. According to the teachers, every classroom should have a computer, Wi-Fi connection, projector, speakers, and other equipment necessary for teaching media literacy. Teachers also mentioned that some schools, especially in rural areas, struggle with inadequate infrastructure and lack of academic resources. Other teachers pointed out that the lack of media literacy training for teachers is another problem. They stated that enabling teachers to successfully master media literacy is not possible without specialized training.

Before the interview ended, the interviewees were asked to give final thoughts and suggestions on the topic discussed. All teachers agreed that the Ministry of Education and other stakeholders should develop a strategy and take important steps to implement the media literacy initiative, starting with investments in facilities and teaching. Given the high priority given to media education at all levels of education, they recommended a radical change in curriculum and teaching methods. Other teachers urged parents and schools to work closely together to promote media literacy in schools. Since most children first come into contact with media at home, media literacy education should focus on critically reflecting on students' media experiences outside the classroom.

**Discussion**

The currently available literature indicates that there is little actual research on the issues and implementation of media education, but there is a great deal of theoretical research on the potential benefits of its introduction into the educational system. In addition, media education is not currently included in Kazakhstan's national curriculum. Therefore, the aim of this study is to find out the extent to which media literacy is taught as part of the national curriculum in Kazakhstan EFL.

The cumulative results show that secondary school teachers are aware of the importance of teaching media literacy. Respondents believed in the value and effectiveness of media literacy education and expressed concern and motivation to include it in their teaching due to the emergence of high culture and increasing student exposure to the media environment. The rapid growth of the media industry in modern society, high media consumption, the growing importance of visual communication, and the urgent need to prepare students for the demands of the future have encouraged the creation of media education programs. In this context, Masterman states that the

educational system needs to update its curricula and go beyond traditional pedagogical methods to include media education in the curriculum EFL. He also argues that media education is an analytical and critical study in which students learn to be active and independent users who can delve deeply into any media text and not just defend themselves against the dangers of the media [5].

Similarly, EFL teachers have argued that emphasizing the pros and cons of media in the classroom does not contribute in any way to the development of students' media literacy and critical thinking skills. Similarly, Xu suggests that media literacy curricula should be developed as part of China's national curriculum reform to support students' lifelong learning [4, p. 228]. He emphasizes that this goal can only be achieved if there is a connection between the content of the curriculum and students' interests and experiences outside the classroom. Before students can critically examine explicit messages, they must understand the relevance of the media texts to which they are exposed.

According to the respondents, encouraging students to think critically and creatively is the most attractive reason for including media literacy in the curriculum. They also state that teaching media literacy in EFL classes helps to engage students both inside and outside the classroom and improves their learning. According to Buckingham, teaching media literacy along with other subject areas improves student learning and makes learning more interesting and relevant. According to the literature, using media literacy as a cross-curricular topic in the English classroom enables teachers to identify and assess their students' learning abilities.

Furthermore, Scheibe and Rogow state that incorporating media literacy can support English Language Arts (ELA) instruction [6]. They explain how ELA teachers can use popular media to teach grammatical, literary, and writing elements. However, respondents still supported the importance of media literacy in protecting students from the manipulation and counterfeiting of some harmful media materials. Media literacy is necessary to protect children and young people in a world where new media messages are constantly invading their lives, and to teach them how to be critical and rational consumers. One of the original goals of media literacy education was to promote the development of informed and healthy media consumers.

When it comes to promoting media literacy in the EFL classroom, EFL teachers are driven to do so. EFL Teachers confirmed their strong desire to teach media literacy, even if they were unsure of how to do it in an effective way. They stated that they are willing to improve their teaching practices because they believe that engaging students in such activities will increase their motivation and academic performance.

Through activities such as discussing media content, teachers demonstrate that media literacy is present to some degree in their classrooms. In a related study, Yates found that more than half of secondary teachers incorporate media literacy into their curriculum through unplanned discussions of general TV viewing behaviour, analysis of advertising, and use of print media [7]. Yates asserts that teachers have ongoing opportunities to incorporate media literacy into their lessons through dialogues that help students improve their media reception skills by strengthening their critical thinking skills. Constructivist and inquiry-based approaches are encouraged by

incorporating media literacy concepts into teaching and learning situations because they allow students to actively contribute to the construction of knowledge rather than merely receiving it.

On the other hand, media researchers argue that the effective implementation of media education has encountered a number of obstacles due to its lack of traditional roots in the educational setting. Respondents to this survey who teach English as a foreign language (EFL) agree that they are not qualified to teach media literacy. In fact, respondents argued that the lack of training is one of the biggest obstacles to incorporating media literacy in Kazakh schools, both as a stand-alone subject and as a cross-curricular subject. In general, non-professional teachers often include media literacy in their teaching. "Many teachers consider media literacy as a pedagogical tool and simply try to attract students' attention and interest in learning without knowing that there is a body of scientific and theoretical evidence on the subject," argues Hobbs [4]. Effective media literacy instruction therefore requires ongoing training and a support system.

According to the teachers of EFL, the development of media literacy education in the country is also hindered. In this sense, respondents state that Kazakhstan classrooms lack the necessary technical tools for teaching media literacy, including computer equipment, Internet access, information projectors, and television monitors, to name a few. In their study Methods of Teaching Media Literacy and Their Impact on Student Learning, Hobbs and Frost confirm that media education in the United States has always been viewed as a matter of developing materials and curriculum. In China, Cheung examined the same problem of integrating media literacy into the education system and found that the main barriers to media literacy learning were related to school support and workload [6]. Cost, availability of consumables and resources, teacher training and development, curriculum constraints, and lack of time are just some of the challenges.

In conclusion, more help is needed to organize and promote a media literacy project in Kazakh schools, as indicated by the interviewees at the end of the interview. Therefore, developing strategic guidelines for the implementation and evaluation of methodological pedagogy is a key component for the development of media literacy education.

**Conclusion**

In summary, this article attempts to examine the level of media literacy in Kazakh education, focusing on EFL classes. The results of the qualitative interviews show how several EFL teachers perceive the teaching of media literacy in their classes. Based on the above, we believe that media literacy can control learners' use of media and use it to learn effectively and engage in the EFL learning environment. However, media literacy is not advocated by stakeholders as an official and important component of the national curriculum. The education system does not provide teachers and students with the tools they need to implement a successful media literacy initiative. Therefore, the advisory highlights the need to recognize media literacy as a component of basic

education and calls for reform of teaching and learning pedagogy and the availability of specialized training and digital resources to prepare today's teachers.

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# ШЕТЕЛ ТІЛДЕРІНДЕ БІЛІМ БЕРУДЕГІ МЕДИА САУАТТЫЛЫҚТЫҢ РӨЛІ

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**Аңдатпа.** Тілдік білім беру үрдісінде, атап айтқанда ағылшын тілін шетел тілі ретінде оқытуда медиа сауаттылықты (МС: ғаламтордағы сан алуан медиа материалдарын талдай білу, іріктей білу және оның шынайы немесе жалған, дұрыс немесе бұрыстығын анықтай білу қабілеті) енгізу қазіргі заманауи білім беру саласындағы күрделі мәселелердің бірі болып табылады. Дегенмен, осы тұста оқушылардың аналитикалық ойлау қабілеттерін дамыту және қалыптастыру және заманауи медиа жүйесінің әртүрлі кодтарын меңгеруге көмектесу үшін медиа сауаттылық бойынша білім беруді оқу бағдарламасына енгізу өте маңызды екенін айта кеткен жөн. Шетел тілін оқытуда медиа сауаттылықты оқытудың перспективаларына, рөлдеріне және әдістеріне басты назар аудара отырып, бұл зерттеу медиа сауаттылықты оқытудың ағылшын тілі сабағында қалай көрініс табатынын зерттеуге бағытталған. Тоғызыншы сынып оқушыларымен, сондай-ақ олардың мұғалімдерімен жартылай құрылымдық сұхбаттарды, сыныптағы бақылауларды және құжаттарды талдауды (оқу жоспарын талдау, күнтізбелік тақырыптық жоспарлау, орта және қысқа мерзімді сабақ жоспарлары) пайдалана отырып, бұл сапалы зерттеу ағылшын тілі мұғалімдерінің медиасауаттылыққа үйрету және баулу және оның мектеп жағдайында қаншалықты тәжірибеде қолданылатыны туралы пікірлерді жан жақты зерттеуге бағытталған. Осылайша, аталмыш зерттеу Қазақстан мұғалімдерінің медиасауаттылық мектеп бағдарламасының міндетті бөлігі болып саналмайды деп есептейтінін көрсетті. Сонымен қатар, бұл зерттеу Қазақстандағы білім беру жүйесі қазақстандық мектептерде сапалы медиалық білім беруді тиімді жүзеге асыру үшін мұғалімдер мен оқушыларды қажетті құралдармен (физикалық және әдістемелік) қамтамасыз ету керектігін көрсетті.

**Тірек сөздер:** ағылшын тілі шет тілі ретінде, медиа сауаттылық, аудиториялық тәжірибе, оқыту, нәтижелер, тілдік дағдылар, проблемалар, перспективалар

# РОЛЬ МЕДИАГРАМОТНОСТИ В ИНОЯЗЫЧНОМ ОБРАЗОВАНИИ

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**Аннотация.** Реализация и внедрение медиаграмотности в процессе языкового образования, в частности, в преподавании английского языка как иностранного, является одной из самых сложных задач в сфере современного образования (МГ: Способность анализировать, сортировать и определять степень правдивости, надежности, а также достоверности информации, взятыз из самых разнообразных материалов СМИ в Интернете). Однако здесь следует отметить, что очень важно включить медиаобразование в учебную программу, чтобы развивать и формировать у учащихся навыки аналитического мышления и

помогать им осваивать различные коды современной медиасистемы. Сосредоточив внимание на перспективах, ролях и методах обучения медиаграмотности при обучении иностранному языку, это исследование направлено на изучение того, как преподавание медиаграмотности отражается на уроках английского языка. Используя полуструктурированные интервью, наблюдения уроков в классе и анализ документов с учениками девятого класса (анализ учебной программы, календарное тематическое планирование, среднесрочные и краткосрочные планы уроков), а также их учителями, это качественное исследование направлено на всестороннее изучение восприятия учителями английского языка преподавания и обучения медиаграмотности и того, в какой степени это практикуется в школе. Таким образом, указанное исследование показало, что педагоги Казахстана считают, что медиаграмотность не считается обязательной частью школьной программы. Кроме того, данное исследование показало, что система образования в Казахстане должна обеспечить учителей и учащихся необходимыми инструментами (физическими и методическими) для эффективной реализации качественного медиаобразования в казахстанских школах.