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Incorporating Media Literacy Into Foreign Language Classrooms to Advance Kazakh Students' Critical Communication Skills

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Abstract
This paper outlines the results of the study that surveyed whether incorporating media literacy into English as a second language teaching promotes Kazakh students' critical communication. We reflect on media literacy practices in language classrooms as modes of teaching that foster students' awareness of media content to recognise and resist fake news and disinformation. The present study investigates how the ability to access, understand, analyse, adjust, create, and communicate messages in various forms can best enhance Kazakh students' language awareness and critical communication. The results indicate that suggested pedagogical frameworks take students through all necessary stages, ideas, and assumptions about media content and structure, contributing to Kazakh students' critical communication development. Students demonstrate significant improvements in critical reading and listening, productive speaking and writing, and responding to the onslaught of media messages. They also acknowledge that media-oriented English language instruction created an environment to envisage real-life context and authentic language use.

Keywords: Classroom Activities, Media Literacy, Creative Communication, Critical Thinking, Language Teaching, Pedagogical Framework

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Introduction

One of the most significant goals of Kazakh Higher Education is to train specialists with a critical eye on ongoing global trends and challenges who can communicate effectively with compassion, mutual respect, responsibility, and equality in a diverse global society (Kuanysheva et al., 2019; Rydchenko et al., 2023; Akhmetova et al., 2023). Needs for effective communication include critical listening, creative cooperating, collaborative problem-solving, and responsible decision-making upon a massive flow of information (Yelubayeva & Mustafina, 2020; Berkinbayeva et al., 2023). Partnership for 21st-century Skills (2003) has declared media literacy (ML) as one of the vital skills present-day students need to live and work successfully. This declaration identified valued outcomes of ML in modern society and the need to incorporate it into education to foster students' awareness of media content in recognising and resisting fake news and disinformation. Critical scholars (Buckingham, 2003, 2015; Hobbs & McGee, 2014; Kellner & Share, 2019) counter that schooling is the first factor to undertake this problem of disparity in media use. Likewise, ML promotes the critical thinking skills necessary to understand and communicate complex issues facing modern society (Worsnop, 2004; Mihailidis, 2014). Other approaches consider that ML skills enable individuals to use media materials intelligently, scrutinise and evaluate their content, critically dissect media forms, investigate effects, and create alternative media messages (MM) in various forms (Kellner & Share, 2005; Potter, 2013). Using social media, Facebook, particularly, supports peer learning, student engagement, and collaborative and contextualised learning (Kelly, 2018). Media literate specialists become intelligent consumers of products and information by comprehending and identifying the influence and meaning behind MM (Jenkins et al., 2009; Cheung & Chau, 2017).

By viewing the media as a tool for teaching critical communication purposes, it is significant to enable students to delineate ‘reliable’ from ‘unreliable’ content (Jenkins et al., 2009), create ways to maintain identities and construct discourse and community (Thorne, 2009) as well as inoculate participants against the harmful effects of media and explore the fluid nature of meaning in media texts (Hobbs & McGee, 2014; Potter, 2010). Thus, teachers need to be able to design adequate media-oriented classroom instructions that encourage students to think critically about MM before they comprehend, manipulate, or create their content in a target language.

ML is in its infancy in the Kazakh education system, so it needs pedagogical solutions to equip teachers with the relevant teaching tools to address this gap. The increasing role of media in consuming and producing new knowledge urges not only the introduction of media education in schools but also the designing of a 'critical' pedagogy to implement it.

This paper describes our attempts to incorporate ML into language learning and teaching (LLT). These attempts aim to understand better how the abilities to access, understand, analyse, evaluate, create, and communicate messages in various formats enhance students’ language awareness and meaningful communication. Language instructions designed within the proposed framework create an environment to envisage real-life context and media resources to complete tasks aligned with their goals. This idea is proposed to ensure educators can access up-to-date teaching resources that keep pace with global trends (Kung, 2016; Fedorov & Mikhaleva, 2020). Many teachers use social media but typically do not create or share messages or incorporate media content into their lessons. This is due to their attitudes towards media, not because they lack technical skills.

We design media-oriented language classroom activities that teach students to decode MM, identify facts versus opinions, assess the influence of those messages on thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, create their messages thoughtfully, and communicate them accurately within their content. The paper outlines the results of a study that surveyed whether incorporating ML into LLT may promote Kazakh students' communication skills. Results lend themselves to exploring some critical questions for ML in language education:

1. What pedagogical framework takes students through the necessary stages, ideas, and assumptions about media content and structure in LLT?
2. What are students' perceptions of mastering ML for promoting activities to improve language skills?

Literature Review

Media Literacy has been defined variously at different times. However, it is commonly understood as a set of skills that enable people to browse, access, analyse, and evaluate images, sounds, and messages and create new ones in spoken and written communications. The ability to use the media content critically, responsibly, creatively, and in a socialised way is crucial to becoming informed and educated adults. ML seeks to offer media consumers the ability to understand the role of media in society and develop significant skills of inquiry and self-expression necessary for all citizens (Hobbs, 2018; Thoman, 1999; Jenkins, 2006). Buckingham (2003) defines ML as the knowledge, skills, and competencies essential to use and interpret media content. Potter (2013) interprets ML as a set of perspectives individuals use to interpret the meaning of MM. He believes individuals need mindful and critical media consumption to participate adequately in public life and contribute to the public discourse. The US National Association of Media Literacy Education defines ML as a capacity to access, analyse, evaluate, create, and act as a critical thinker, effective communicator, and active citizen using all forms of communication. It does not mean that all media consumers are already 'incredibly' capable and critical (Reyna et al., 2018). It can be accepted that audiences can be active and indeed 'critical' until they realise that there are things that they generally do not know about media but want to learn (Buckingham, 2015). All scholars and documents accept that deepening people's critical abilities broadens their understanding and awareness of what is happening around them and probably what will happen soon. We, therefore, contend that ML encourages students to be informed, engaged, and empowered to think critically while making decisions about message consumption and/or content production.

The need to enhance Kazakh students' critical awareness within LLT is urged because current National Education Standards are based on the designers' separate learning theories and goals without incorporating the socio-cultural content (Fedorov & Levitskaya, 2019; Yelubayeva et al., 2023). Now more than ever, there is a vital need for mechanisms to help students navigate high rates of media space and facilitate their own 'sense of self' along the way. There have been several attempts to structure the implementation of ML to education standards (Thoman & Jolls, 2004; Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Mihailidis, 2014). The CML MediaLit Kit proposed a framework that boosts students' knowledge of current media content, practising applying that knowledge to new situations, analysing information, and communicating in a diverse global media culture. These skills include *Access* (ability to collect valuable information and comprehend its meaning); *Analyse* (ability to examine the form, structure, and sequence of the message); *Evaluate* (ability to relate messages to their own experience and make judgments about their quality and relevance); and *Create* (ability

to “write” their ideas and use of various communication technologies to create, edit and disseminate their message (Thoman & Jolls, 2004).

Mihailidis (2014) suggests the 5 A’s framework: *Access* to media, *Awareness* of media power, *Assessment* of how media covers international and supranational issues, *Appreciation* for media’s role in creating civil societies, and *Action* to encourage better communication across cultural, social, and political problems. This framework is developed to assist young learners in understanding their role as global citizens, respecting and valuing diversity, understanding how the world works in diverse contexts, contributing to communities to make the world a better place to live, and taking responsibility for their actions.

Both frameworks comprehensively structure classroom activities to implement ML in education. *In terms of LLT, a more tangible and meaningful approach to mastering learners’ metacognitive skills is needed. This approach should reflect thoroughly on the realities of media content, exploring how words, issues, and ideas are formed, function, and are related across contexts.*

Table 1: Communication and Media Literacy

Learning Objectives: Training Critical Thinkers and Effective Communicators					
Learning Skills					
Lexical Skills		Language Skills		Communication & Media Skills	
Competencies					
Accessing	Detecting	Analysing	Adjusting	Creating	Communicating
Student-centred Teaching Methods					
Case-based learning	Inquiry-Based Learning	Problem-Based Learning	Project-Based Learning	Collaborative learning	
Learning Instructions					
Content-based		Technology-based		Competency-Based	
Resources					
Audio & visual materials		Print materials		Internet resources	
Learning outcomes					
1) evaluating the reliability of information obtained from various sources, 2) conveying a message through various forms of media with accuracy, clarity, and creativity, 3) encouraging students to compare different perspectives in media texts, 4) engaging students in research and critical thinking, 5) fostering students’ collaborative autonomous learning abilities, 6) mastering students’ proficiency in communicating and disseminating their thoughts and ideas, 7) acknowledging the values and perspectives embedded in the plot and 8) encouraging students’ interest in various global and local issues.					

Considering the results of prior theoretical and empirical research, we propose a framework that takes students through all the necessary stages, ideas, and assumptions about media content and structure with which to empower their critical communication. *By critical communication, we mean the attainment of competence that fosters a critical understanding of how communication functions in different contexts by identifying key concepts, connecting multiple ideas, adapting messages to situations and audiences, and creating messages with compassion and mutual respect*. The Communication and Media Literacy (CML) Model is a pedagogical framework for organising and structuring classroom activities that create educational environments for applying theoretical concepts to tackle real, tangible issues, demonstrating the complexity and unpredictability of actual issues (Table 1). The CML framework can develop students' critical thinking and communication skills.

Bringing mass-mediated materials to LLT environments through well-organised and structured teaching models may be more effective and engaging than education focused solely on exposing media manipulation to bridge the gap between the students' classroom and real-life experiences with the media (Gee, 2009; Hattani, 2016). This approach encourages students to be aware of the choices they make in their life and career and how they fit into a greater societal context. Hence, integrated media and LLT classrooms are good environments for students to be exposed to natural language, extract accurate information from actual text, and react to trends and challenges like L1 speakers do.

Methodology

Practical Applications of ML for Language Instruction

This section aims to provide examples of practical applications of ML in LLT. This application can be significantly enhanced if it is contextualised within task-based activities. For this purpose, we designed a set of task-based activities within the comprehensive CML model that foster the abilities listed below:

- assessing the credibility of information from different sources,
- being aware of and appreciating diverse cultural perspectives,
- communicating accurately, clearly, and creatively using different forms of media,
- encouraging students to compare different perspectives in media texts,
- engaging students in research and critical thinking,
- fostering students' collaborative autonomous learning abilities,
- mastering students' proficiency in communicating and disseminating their thoughts and ideas,
- recognising values and points of view embedded in the plot and
- stimulating students' interest in various global and local issues.

These activities include instructions for reading, listening/viewing specific MM, and then reflecting on them by analysing questions. The advantage of devising teaching activities based on media products is that one can vary the degree of difficulty if you have to deal with diverse language proficiency levels within the same group of students (Yelubayeva et al., 2023). Practical applications at every stage are described in the following paragraphs.

Accessing and Detecting Messages

Access to various media products further to inform, engage, and provide varied viewpoints is the initial stage in facilitating, sharing, and expressing communication needs. Therefore, classroom instructions for accessing should be targeted at defining the source of information, obstacles to access, and how media technologies and platforms influence the accessibility of information. Classroom instructions for critically *Detecting* how messages are constructed to carry a specific message for a specific audience by recognising vocabulary, symbols, and information techniques should foster abilities to provide context, reflect values, develop ideology, and cultivate representation. These activities enable students to consider the origins of information and to define the prevalence of information in society.

Analysing and Adjusting Messages

Classroom activities that enable students to *Analyse* the design of the message's form, structure, and sequence include tasks for identifying the way messages are constructed in order to build meaning, examining consumers' interpretation of the messages using compare/contrast, fact/opinion, cause/effect, listing and sequencing strategies, deconstructing the physical attributes of messages used to develop a specific meaning or reinforce an idea and others. Message *Adjusting* is implemented by relating it to the evaluator's experience and judging its accuracy, quality, and significance to develop a specific meaning or reinforce an idea. Language instruction improves students' ability to evaluate message quality and judge value based on principles.

Creating and Communicating Messages

The task instructions for *Creating* MM address cultivating critical thinking skills and creating opportunities for enhanced dialogue that can lead to more diverse and varying viewpoints. These tasks foster abilities to use brainstorming, planning, composing, and revision processes, to use written and spoken language effectively and accurately and to use various types of communication technologies in constructing messages. Depending on the level, teachers can ask students to create presentations, videos, articles, or social campaign posters. *Communication* involves transferring messages effectively for various purposes and audiences. There is some evidence to prove that many students fail to communicate their ideas or points of view for various reasons. Enabling students to communicate ideas and information actively supports social participation, campaigns, and active citizenship.

Participants

Six groups ($n = 88$) of first-year master students in History and Archeology at al-Farabi Kazakh National University participated in the study. All participants were twenty-three and twenty-four years old. The goal was to study first-year graduate students mainly because it is a critical age in the education system when their self-esteem, self-expression, and self-image are gradually reinforced. The History groups $(n = 45)$ were determined as the control groups (CG), and the Archeology groups $(n = 43)$ were determined as the treatment groups (TG). The selection of Archeology groups as TG was based on the fact that the students from these groups were less active in sessions of questioning, answering, and discussion during learning before the experiment. In addition, the academic performance of these groups was lower than in CG, and we decided to attempt to raise these students' learning outcomes experimentally. During the experiment, the TG tested the application of ML to language learning based on the CML Model, whereas the CG was provided with the application of conventional learning.

Results

This study explored language proficiency pre-test, post-test, delayed post-test, a questionnaire, an interview and panel discussions with students to measure the effectiveness of the CML model in the media-incorporated language classroom and reply to the study research questions. The language proficiency test consisted of Writing (reading, listening and article critique) and Speaking parts. Articles came from news networking platforms such as BBC Global News (bbcglobalnews.com), The Guardian (https://www.theguardian.com), and Euronews (euronews.com), among others. The student's analysis of the text plot, key message, or character was followed by a contextual discussion and critical view during the

Speaking part. The tests were identical in scope and format and did not differ. The test validity was assessed by PhD language instructors teaching English for more than ten years. Pearson's correlations (Pearson's *r*) were used to calculate the interrater reliability, and the obtained coefficient (*r=80*) was confirmed to ensure the agreement between instructors.

The first step in performing a one-way MANOVA is to quantitatively compare the language proficiency of CG and TG students across four components: reading, listening, writing, and speaking. MANOVA results show that the two groups were homogeneous – without significant multivariate and univariate differences in English language proficiency level before receiving treatment sessions (Figure 1). Figure 1 demonstrates the results of the pre-test and post-test.

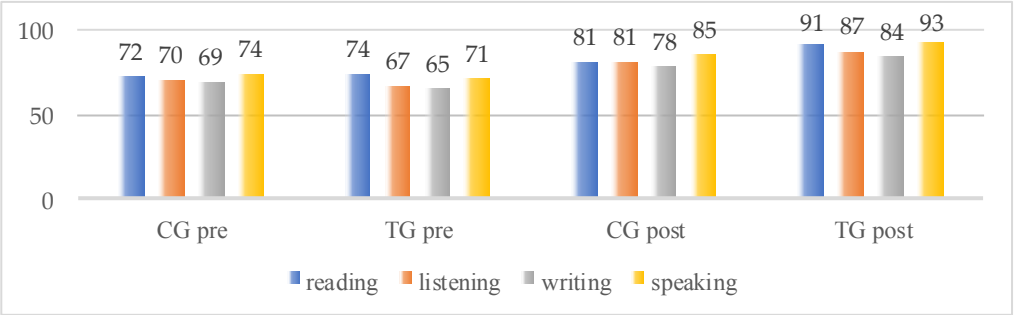

Figure 1: Pre- and post-experiment English Proficiency Test Results in CG and TG

The pre-test was held in the first week of the twelve-week treatment session (Spring Semester 2022), and in the last week of the treatment session, students had a post-test.

Following the language proficiency post-test, the students had a questionnaire. For this, the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) was employed to judge students' satisfaction with the introduction of ML in EL Classrooms. The scale contained four statements: (1) ML increases students' interest in learning English; (2) ML practice involves mastering four language skills (reading, listening, writing, and speaking); (3) Media products make English content more meaningful and flexible; (4) Media products master critical awareness. The participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a statement on a seven-point Likert scale (from 7 = 'strongly agree' to 1 = 'strongly disagree'). Total scores ranged from 1 to 35, where the lowest score indicates the respondent's *Extreme Dissatisfaction* (scores between 5-9), scores ranging from 10 to 14 indicate *Dissatisfaction*, 19-19 indicate *Slight Dissatisfaction*, 20 indicate *Neutral* position, 21-25 indicate *Slight Satisfaction*, 26-30 indicate *Satisfaction* and 31-35 indicate *Extreme Satisfaction*. The questionnaire results are given in Figure 2.

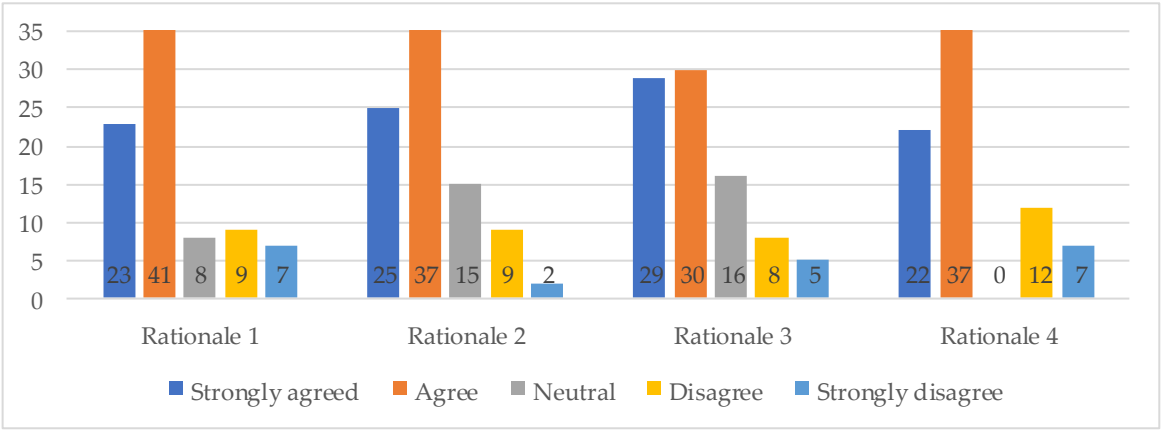

Figure 2: Students' Satisfaction with Introducing ML in EL Classrooms

The follow-up interview was conducted voluntarily. Twenty-one out of eighty-eight respondents attended a follow-up interview to interpret their answers to the questionnaire. About three-quarters of the respondents (73%) agreed that implementing ML education in English instruction fosters motivation for studying English. When students are instructed to apply their media experiences in educational settings, they are more motivated to master the language competency (Bates, 2019). 71% of the respondents indicated that ML education is closely related to teaching the four language skills. The Interviewees claimed it was natural for ML to be implemented in English lessons as they listened to different records/videos, read posts and articles, wrote messages/essays/emails, and commented/discussed various issues. Its meaningful and flexible content is another central argument for implementing ML in English classrooms. 67% of the respondents claimed that English teaching content is flexible for students' abilities and interests. 67% of the respondents approve that ML practice implies the students' broad erudition and capacities to analyse and synthesise various issues in MM. Active use of methods to analyse and structure the information independently, check the facts, and reach valid conclusions promotes students' cognitive activity and develops critical thinking. Respondents' generalised attitudes towards surveys demonstrate their willingness and readiness to participate in the experiment. They believe the experiment can substantially affect the quality of LLT and academic achievements.

Two weeks later, a face-to-face panel discussion was held after treatment sessions. The panel aimed to identify students' perceptions of the effectiveness of incorporating ML into their language learning. The analysis reveals positive dynamics in the answers to the questions:

1. *Do you feel your English has improved within media-oriented language classrooms?*
2. *Why is critical thinking important in language learning?*
3. *What is the impact of ML on language education?*

Participants found the sessions in the experiment satisfying. They confirmed the positive effect of language and ML incorporation in developing their receptive and productive skills. They stated that they had achieved higher reading, listening, and writing achievement scores than they had before. Most participants claimed that during experimental learning with media texts, they learned language faster, and they could express their ideas and views clearly, confidently, and meaningfully in communication as they came across real-life situations and real-time language used beyond the classroom. Another rationale for the efficiency of the experiment that students indicated was the ability to discover values and ideas embedded in MM, critically interpret them, and decide whether to accept or reject them.

Furthermore, they mentioned that during the experiment, they could explore new areas of their job and seek knowledge, clarification, and new solutions for raised problems, evaluate statements and arguments, and distinguish between facts and opinions creatively and critically. They were willing to examine their beliefs and admit a lack of knowledge or understanding when needed, showing humility. Perhaps most of all, they highlighted the relevance of the communication and social skills gained from the experience to their future professional needs, which create a positive environment to promote their understanding of the world by filtering the MM for distortions and bias issues of particular interest to them.

Overall, participants reflected positively on using media materials in LLT. Regarding the effectiveness and feasibility of the CML Model, it served as an efficient means to measure media literate communication skills when testing students. Most participants (85%) found the CML Model incorporated language and ML effectively, and 79% of the respondents declared

the feasibility of task-based assignments, whereas 21% found the tasks infeasible. Figure 3 reports the results of the students' perception of the CML Model.

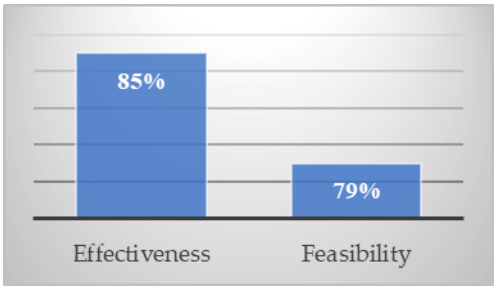

Figure 3: Students' Perception of the CML Framework

Discussion and Conclusion

Further talks on the CML Model feasibility figured out factors that had contributed to the failure in the task accomplishment. The first factor for failure was poor communication. We discovered that some students needed to establish a positive communication channel. They concurred that their confidence increased over time, and their initial anxiety decreased as they got to know their peers and focused on understanding one another. This led to the teachers' decision to establish a task management system that enables smooth communication. The second is low language proficiency. Despite the group demonstrating an overall pre-intermediate Kazakh proficiency level, there were poor Kazakh students. Thus, we concluded that classroom activities still need to be adjusted for students' needs individually, and third was poor monitoring. During the experiment, we realised that assigning roles to all team members is insufficient; teachers should monitor progress regularly and appoint team members responsible for their actions. Once they feel responsible for their actions, they will perform better and demonstrate better results.

This paper attempts to justify that if students are guided to see, read, and listen beyond what is presented to them lexically and grammatically, they can become independent and critical thinkers. In this study, we found confirmation of our findings on the interrelation between ML and language proficiency, which results in students' academic success. They were able to gain access to various media formats and technologies to facilitate information to create, share, and communicate messages; analyse how messages are constructed to carry a specific message for a target audience; assess information extracted from the text; demonstrate high levels of critical judgment, interpretation skills; demonstrate greater mutual understanding, recognition of diversity in multicultural and multilingual societies and respect for such diversities; communicate effectively contextual information and critical perspectives extracted from a text. These skills led to significant improvements in critical thinking and creative written and spoken communication.

One of the challenges for students in applying critical and creative communication to their actions is fear that they might be left to encounter a cynical and defeatist judgment or opinion in response. This fear must be eliminated in the classroom by constant practice rather than being solved with quick tips. Thus, task-based instructions based on the CML Model call students for discussion and critical view to enhance their communication skills and critical thinking and promote social awareness and engagement.

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