



DEVELOPING MEDIA LITERACY IN TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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Abstract

In today's world, where social media, videos, and digital content are everywhere, teaching foreign languages needs to go beyond just grammar and vocabulary. Students learning a new language should also know how to navigate and critically understand media in that language. This article dives into how we can weave media literacy into foreign language education at the university level. We'll look at what teaching methods work, the hurdles instructors face, and the benefits students gain. Using a mix of surveys and a hands-on classroom experiment with English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, this study shows that media literacy can make learning more engaging, sharpen critical thinking, and spark creativity. But it's not all smooth sailing—challenges like limited teacher training, lack of resources, and institutional gaps can make things tricky. The takeaway? Schools need better training, resources, and curriculum updates to make this work.

Keywords: Media literacy, language learning, critical thinking, EFL, teaching strategies, multimodal learning.

Introduction

Background and Significance

In today's digital world, students are surrounded by media everywhere — social networks, videos, blogs, podcasts, and online advertisements. For those learning a foreign language, these media platforms can become not only a source of entertainment but also a valuable learning environment. Exposure to authentic media materials allows learners to hear natural speech, explore real cultural situations, and understand how language works in daily life. However, to benefit from this environment, learners must know how to think critically about what they see and hear. This skill is called **media literacy**.



Media literacy means being able to access, analyze, evaluate, and create information in different forms such as text, sound, and image. In the context of foreign language education, it is not only about understanding media content but also about using the target language to discuss, interpret, and produce it. Recent research (Bilotserkovets et al., 2021; Alasal, 2025) highlights that media literacy helps language learners develop critical thinking, creativity, and intercultural awareness. Therefore, it is becoming an important part of modern education systems worldwide.

Despite the growing importance of media literacy, many foreign language programs still focus mainly on traditional materials such as textbooks and printed texts. Teachers may hesitate to integrate media because of limited time, lack of resources, or insufficient training in using digital tools. In addition, students sometimes find it difficult to analyze media critically rather than simply consume it passively. These issues show that there is a clear need to understand how media literacy can be effectively developed in foreign language teaching.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore ways to develop media literacy in foreign language teaching at the university level. It aims to identify what teaching methods can help students build their ability to understand and use media in a foreign language, what kinds of outcomes can be achieved, and what challenges teachers face in this process. The research is designed to find practical solutions that can make foreign language learning more engaging, meaningful, and relevant to real-world communication.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What methods and activities are currently used by university teachers to develop media literacy in foreign language classes?
2. How does the integration of media literacy tasks influence students' learning outcomes and motivation?
3. What difficulties do teachers experience when trying to include media literacy in foreign language instruction?

Methods

Research Design

This study used a **mixed-methods design**, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The main reason for choosing this design was to gain a more complete understanding of how media literacy can be developed in foreign language teaching. Quantitative data helped to measure students' progress and attitudes, while qualitative data provided deeper insights into their experiences and opinions.

The research included two main phases. The first phase was a **survey** conducted among university language teachers to explore their current practices, beliefs, and difficulties related to teaching media literacy. The second phase involved a **classroom intervention** with university students learning English as a foreign language (EFL). During this phase, students participated in lessons that included media literacy tasks, and their progress was measured before and after the intervention.

Participants and Setting

The study was conducted at three universities in different countries to get a broader view of media literacy in foreign language teaching.

- In the **survey phase**, 85 language instructors from local universities in Uzbekistan, took part. They were selected through email invitations and professional teaching networks. All participants had experience teaching English or another foreign language at the university level.
- In the **classroom intervention**, 60 students studying English as a foreign language were involved. They were divided into two groups: an *experimental group* (30 students) and a *control group* (30 students). All students were at an intermediate level of English proficiency and were enrolled in courses focused on reading, writing, and speaking skills.

Intervention Procedure

The classroom intervention lasted for **eight weeks**. Both groups received the same amount of instruction time, but the content differed.

- The **control group** followed the regular university English course, which focused on grammar, vocabulary, and reading from textbooks.



- The **experimental group** received additional **media literacy-based instruction**. These lessons included tasks where students analyzed different media texts such as short videos, news articles, infographics, and social media posts in English. They discussed the purpose, bias, and audience of each piece of media. Students also created their own simple media products — for example, infographics, short opinion blogs, or digital posters on a given topic.

The lessons were designed according to the five key components of media literacy: access, analyze, evaluate, create, and reflect. Each week focused on one or two components, allowing students to gradually build both linguistic and critical thinking skills.

Data Collection Tools

Several tools were used to collect data:

1. **Pre- and post-tests** – to measure changes in reading comprehension, critical thinking, and writing quality.
2. **Motivational questionnaires** – to evaluate students’ interest, confidence, and engagement in lessons using media.
3. **Teacher surveys** – to understand instructors’ experiences, beliefs, and challenges regarding media literacy integration.
4. **Interviews** – semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 students and 5 teachers to gather detailed feedback about their perceptions and experiences.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data from tests and questionnaires were analyzed using basic statistical methods, including paired and independent sample *t*-tests. These tests helped determine whether the differences between pre- and post-test scores were statistically significant. Effect sizes were calculated to estimate how strong the improvements were.

Qualitative data from interviews were analyzed thematically. The researcher read through all responses several times and grouped them into categories such as “benefits,” “challenges,” and “student motivation.” This process helped to identify common patterns and key ideas expressed by participants.

Ethical Considerations

All participants were informed about the aim of the research and gave their consent to take part voluntarily. They were assured that their responses would remain confidential and would be used only for academic purposes. The study followed the ethical guidelines of the universities involved, and the experimental group received access to all materials used in the study after completion, ensuring fairness for both groups.

Results

This section presents the main findings of the study. The results are divided into two parts: the first part summarizes the outcomes of the **teacher survey**, and the second part presents the results from the **classroom intervention** with students. The purpose of this section is to show what kinds of teaching practices are used, how media literacy affected students' performance, and what challenges were identified during the process.

1. Results from the Teacher Survey

The survey collected responses from **85 language instructors** from local universities in Uzbekistan. The results showed that a large majority of teachers believed that **media literacy is an essential part of modern foreign language education**. About **92%** of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that teaching media literacy helps students think critically, understand cultural aspects, and communicate more effectively in the target language.

However, the data also showed that media literacy is not yet fully integrated into most language courses.

- Around **45%** of teachers said they regularly used media-based activities, such as analyzing videos, discussing online news, or creating social media posts in the target language.
- About **30%** said they used such activities occasionally, and **25%** admitted that they rarely or never used them.

When asked about the main obstacles to integrating media literacy, teachers mentioned several issues:



- **Lack of training** (around 60% of respondents) — Many teachers said they had not received formal education or workshops on how to teach media literacy.
- **Time limitations** — Instructors felt that the existing curriculum was already full, and it was difficult to include extra activities.
- **Limited institutional support** — Several participants noted that their universities did not prioritize media literacy or provide enough digital resources.
- **Unequal access to technology** — In some universities, not all students had personal devices or stable internet connections.

Overall, the survey results indicated that while teachers recognize the importance of media literacy, many still face practical barriers when trying to apply it in their classrooms.

2. Results from the Classroom Intervention

The second part of the study compared the performance of the **experimental group** (who received media literacy-based instruction) and the **control group** (who followed traditional instruction). Both groups took the same pre-tests and post-tests at the beginning and end of the eight-week program.

2.1 Quantitative Results

The analysis of test results showed clear improvements in the experimental group compared to the control group. The following table summarizes the main findings:

Skill/Measure	Pre-Test Mean (Experimental)	Post-Test Mean (Experimental)	Pre-Test Mean (Control)	Post-Test Mean (Control)
Reading comprehension	68.2	80.5	67.9	72.4
Critical thinking (media analysis tasks)	52.3	70.8	51.6	54.8
Writing quality	60.1	74.7	61.2	66.2
Motivation (on 5-point scale)	3.2	4.1	3.3	3.6

As the data show, the students in the experimental group improved significantly in all skills. Their reading comprehension and writing quality increased by more than 10 points on average, and their critical thinking scores improved by almost 20 points. The motivation scale also rose from 3.2 to 4.1, showing that students found the lessons with media content more engaging and relevant. In contrast, the control group showed only small improvements, which were not statistically significant.

2.2 Qualitative Results

In addition to test scores, interviews with students and teachers provided valuable qualitative insights. Three main themes emerged from the analysis:

1. Higher Motivation and Interest

Most students said that working with real media materials (such as short videos, infographics, and social media posts) made their English lessons more interesting. They liked that the materials were connected to real life and current topics. One student commented: *“It was more exciting to learn from things we see on the internet every day. I felt like I was learning real English, not only textbook English.”*

2. Improved Critical Awareness

Many participants said that they learned to look at media more carefully. They became more aware of issues such as bias, stereotypes, and cultural differences. For example, one student mentioned that after analyzing several English-language advertisements, she started noticing how language can influence people’s opinions.

3. Challenges and Difficulties

Both students and teachers pointed out some difficulties. Some students lacked technical skills to create digital materials at first. Teachers said it took extra time to prepare media-based lessons and to assess multimodal projects fairly. However, most agreed that the benefits outweighed the challenges.

Summary of Findings

In summary, the results demonstrated that integrating media literacy tasks into foreign language teaching can have a strong positive effect on students’ learning



outcomes. Students in the experimental group not only improved their language skills but also became more motivated and critically aware. Teachers, on the other hand, recognized the importance of media literacy but highlighted the need for better training and institutional support to implement it effectively.

Results

The analysis of classroom observations, student reflections, and teacher interviews revealed several important findings about developing media literacy in foreign language teaching. The results are presented according to the research questions.

1. Current Methods and Activities Used by Teachers

The study found that most teachers already integrate some form of media into their classes, even if they do not always describe it as *media literacy instruction*. Common practices included using short videos, online news articles, and social media posts in the target language to support listening and reading comprehension. Teachers also used podcasts for pronunciation practice and YouTube clips for cultural discussions.

However, deeper critical analysis of media messages — for example, questioning bias, reliability, or author’s intention — was less common. Only a few teachers reported designing lessons where students had to compare news from different sources or evaluate online advertisements. These activities were usually implemented in advanced-level classes, where students had stronger language proficiency.

2. Effects of Media Literacy Tasks on Learning and Motivation

Both teachers and students observed that using authentic media increased student engagement and motivation. Learners enjoyed exploring current topics such as environmental issues, technology, or entertainment through social networks and online videos. They also appreciated the opportunity to learn “real” language used by native speakers in everyday situations.

Students’ reflections showed that media literacy tasks helped them expand vocabulary, improve listening comprehension, and gain confidence in speaking. In addition, many students reported that they became more aware of how media messages could influence opinions and emotions. Teachers noted that group



discussions about media content encouraged collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking — skills that are highly valued in modern education.

3. Challenges in Implementing Media Literacy

Despite these positive effects, several challenges were identified. The most common problem was the lack of time to prepare appropriate materials and to guide students through critical media analysis in detail. Teachers mentioned that adapting authentic media to the learners' language level required extra effort.

Another difficulty was related to digital competence. Some teachers felt uncertain about using online platforms effectively or selecting reliable sources. Limited access to technology in certain classrooms also made it difficult to use interactive media regularly. Moreover, a few students struggled to analyze media critically because they were used to accepting online information without questioning it.

Overall, the findings suggest that while media use is growing in foreign language education, the development of full media literacy — including critical evaluation and production skills — still needs more systematic support.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that while foreign language teachers are increasingly integrating media into their lessons, the development of *media literacy* as a structured skill remains only partially achieved. Teachers and students recognize the value of media-based learning for improving linguistic and cultural competence, but they often face practical and methodological challenges in turning simple media use into critical media engagement.

Integration of Media Literacy and Language Learning

The results confirm earlier research (Buckingham, 2019; Gilster, 2022) emphasizing that media literacy education can enrich language learning by exposing students to authentic and culturally relevant materials. When learners interact with videos, online articles, or social media posts in the target language, they practice not only comprehension but also interpretation and evaluation. This process helps them develop a deeper understanding of meaning, tone, and context — key elements of both linguistic and media competence.



Furthermore, the use of media supports the development of **21st-century skills** such as critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration. Group discussions and digital projects allow students to use the target language for real purposes, such as expressing opinions, debating social issues, or creating media content. These practices make language learning more interactive and aligned with students' everyday experiences in the digital world.

Challenges in Implementation

However, the study also revealed that teachers often encounter barriers when trying to integrate media literacy fully. Similar to the findings of Alqurashi (2023) and Lin (2021), the most common issues were a lack of time, digital competence, and access to resources. Many teachers felt confident using videos or online texts for comprehension tasks, but fewer were prepared to guide students through the process of analyzing media bias, identifying persuasive techniques, or comparing different viewpoints.

This gap suggests that teacher training programs should include more focus on **digital pedagogy and critical media analysis**. In-service workshops could help teachers learn how to design tasks that balance language learning with media literacy objectives. For instance, instead of only watching a video, students could be asked to evaluate its credibility, summarize its message, and discuss its potential impact — all in the target language.

The Role of Motivation and Autonomy

Another important observation is the strong motivational effect of using media materials. Students reported that authentic, up-to-date content made lessons more enjoyable and meaningful. This finding aligns with Deci and Ryan's (2017) self-determination theory, which highlights that autonomy and relevance increase learners' intrinsic motivation. When students choose their own media topics or create their own digital projects, they take ownership of their learning.

Developing media literacy in this way not only improves linguistic skills but also fosters **learner autonomy**, a crucial element in lifelong language learning. Students who can independently evaluate and use media in a foreign language are more likely to continue learning beyond the classroom.



Implications for Future Practice

Based on these findings, it is clear that media literacy should not be treated as an optional addition to foreign language education but as an essential part of it. Teachers need support in designing integrated lessons where students both learn the language and analyze media critically. Universities could encourage interdisciplinary collaboration between language departments and media studies programs to develop joint courses or shared resources.

Moreover, curriculum developers should ensure that media literacy outcomes — such as evaluating credibility, identifying stereotypes, and creating responsible digital content — are clearly stated in learning objectives. This would help institutionalize media literacy as a standard component of language education, not just an occasional classroom activity.

Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight the growing importance of **media literacy** in teaching foreign languages at the university level. In a world where students are constantly surrounded by digital information, developing the ability to analyze, interpret, and create media in a foreign language is no longer optional — it is a necessary part of modern education.

This research has shown that teachers increasingly use media to make their lessons more authentic and motivating. Students benefit from exposure to real-life materials such as online videos, news, and social media posts, which improve their vocabulary, listening, and speaking skills. However, many teachers still focus on using media for language practice rather than for developing deeper critical thinking. True media literacy goes beyond watching or reading content — it involves questioning, evaluating, and producing media messages responsibly in the target language.

The study also revealed that **teachers face several obstacles** when integrating media literacy into their lessons, including a lack of time, limited digital competence, and insufficient resources. These challenges make it difficult to move from simple media use to full media education. Therefore, **teacher training and institutional support** are essential. Workshops, professional development programs, and collaboration with digital experts can help teachers design activities that combine language learning with critical media analysis.



Another important conclusion is that **media-based learning increases students' motivation and autonomy**. When students work with media topics that are relevant to their lives, they feel more engaged and confident in using the language. This active participation helps them develop both linguistic and cognitive skills, preparing them to communicate effectively in real-world digital environments. Overall, the integration of media literacy in foreign language teaching has strong potential to make education more relevant, engaging, and future-oriented. To achieve this, universities and educators should view media literacy not only as a tool for language learning but as a **core educational goal** that supports critical awareness, creativity, and responsible communication in the global information age.

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