

## **School-based Media Literacy Education: Balancing Critique, Ethics and Creative Expression**

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### **KEY IMPLICATIONS**

1. Media literacy in English Language education should not just focus on critical analysis and ethics but also on creative expression.
2. School media literacy education should balance the current heavy emphasis on cyber wellness with training in technical and production skills.
3. English Language is a key subject for developing media literacy, but it is not enough.

### **BACKGROUND**

Statistics indicate that Singapore youths spend a great deal of time engaged with digital media (National Youth Council, 2014). In doing so, they act as members of communities and are engaged in literacy practices that involve texts, images and sounds. Researchers have argued that supporting young people to become active, reflective and critical users of contemporary media is an important task for schools in the 21st century (Jenkins et al., 2009). Media literacy is recognized in Singapore as an element of English language (EL) education in the national syllabus. Yet despite curricular inclusion, there is no evidence of whether and how media literacy is taught in English language classes.

### **FOCUS OF STUDY**

This project explored how media literacy education is integrated into the teaching of English in Singapore secondary schools. Media literacy is understood as the ability to critically analyze, evaluate and create texts in diverse forms and media. The study aimed to first find out English teachers' understanding and current pedagogic practice of media literacy and second to develop and trial a pedagogic approach that would enable teachers to systematically infuse media literacy into their teaching of English. The framework encompassed functional, critical, ethical and aesthetic elements of media literacy to foster engagement with diverse media.

### **KEY FINDINGS**

While there was strong support among teachers for media literacy, most were mainly concerned with the critical evaluation of media texts and their impact on audiences. Less support was noted for expressive and productive dimensions of media literacy. This emphasis on receptive over productive skills was also evident in teachers' pedagogic practice.

Data from students suggested a gap between media literacy education and students' lives. Yet aware of the high-stakes educational

environment, students also wanted media education to help them to excel academically. Most students were critical of what they saw as disproportionate emphasis on cyber wellness.

The pedagogic framework was able to bridge these gaps through a systematic teaching of various aspects of media literacy and through anchoring skills development within a thematically focused unit. Key challenges to the sustainability of the approach include the persistent separation of language skills from content/context in EL teaching in Singapore, and teachers' concern with teaching skills tested in exams.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS

In order to foster media literacy through EL, more space should be given to multimedia and digital forms of expression in both teaching and assessment. Teachers should also consider thematically organized units in order to facilitate links between skills and students' lives.

While EL is an important subject for media literacy education, it alone cannot achieve this curricular goal. Current school-wide initiatives primarily focused on cyber wellness should be expanded to capture all aspects of students' media experiences.

Media literacy should be taught as a distinctive component in English teachers' pre-service and professional development courses, emphasizing its broader objectives beyond those articulated in the English Language syllabus.

## PARTICIPANTS

Over 200 English teachers from 18 secondary schools participated in the survey. The second phase of the project involved four teachers and their upper secondary class from two different schools.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

In the first phase of the project an online survey mapping teachers' understanding and current pedagogic practice of media literacy was administered to 202 secondary EL teachers from 18 schools. In the second phase, the project team worked with four teachers from two different schools to develop and implement a media literacy unit. Key data sources included: 1) Classroom observations; 2) Teacher interviews/reflection forms; 3) Student focus groups, media logs and feedback forms. Data were analysed using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods.

## REFERENCES

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