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Published in the USA
 International Journal of Media and Information Literacy
 Issued since 2016.
 E-ISSN: 2500-106X
 2026. 11(1): 118-127

DOI: 10.13187/ijmil.2026.1.118
<https://ijmil.cherkasgu.press>



The Model of Critical Media Education: Toward a Critical Media and Information Literacy Paradigm

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Abstract

This article develops Critical Media Education (CME) as a theoretically grounded paradigm within media and information literacy (MIL) scholarship and media literacy education. Moving beyond instrumental or protectionist approaches, CME is theorized as an emancipatory model aimed at cultivating learners able to interrogate and contest the power relations reproduced through mediated discourse and platform infrastructures. Media and information are conceptualized not as neutral reflections of reality but as discursive and ideological practices that shape meanings, identities, and social consensus. Anchored in Freirean critical pedagogy and complemented by cultural studies and critical political economy, the article integrates four interrelated dimensions: critical epistemology, textual and discourse critique, political economy and platform critique, and praxis-oriented media production. These dimensions are operationalized through guiding analytical questions and indicative classroom practices, offering a usable framework for media literacy education, teacher education, and curriculum work. The article also addresses risks of moralization and outlines safeguards that preserve plural interpretation, autonomous judgment, democratic participation, and future empirical development in datafied societies for contemporary classrooms and wider public cultures. It further argues that CME advances media literacy education when critical reading, structural platform analysis, and civic action are connected within one coherent pedagogical model for contemporary democratic societies.

Keywords: critical media education, media and information literacy, critical media literacy, critical pedagogy, media power, cultural hegemony, political economy of media, platform governance, algorithmic curation, democratic citizenship.

1. Introduction

In the contemporary era, where media – especially digital media – exerts an extraordinary influence on the ways individuals understand and interpret the world, the need for an education that promotes critique and reflexive awareness has become increasingly urgent. In a society dominated by traditional and digital media, critical media education represents an essential pedagogical approach aimed at fostering active, conscious, and critical citizens.

The model of critical media education draws on the tradition of critical pedagogy and critical communication theory, developing as a response to the profound influence of media on the shaping of social reality, identities, and power relations. Unlike instrumental models of media education, which focus primarily on technical or protective skills, the critical model views media as a structure of power, ideology, and social representation, emphasizing analysis, reflection, and emancipatory action.

Traditionally, media literacy has been conceptualized mainly as the development of technical skills for using media or as a protective tool against harmful influences of information. However,

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such approaches often treat the individual as a passive consumer of media content, ignoring the political, ideological, and cultural role of media in shaping public opinion, identity, and social relations (Buckingham, 2003; Fedorov, Levitskaya, 2015; Gálik, 2019; Kellner, Share, 2007).

The model of critical media education emerges as a response to these limitations. It conceptualizes education as an emancipatory practice rooted in Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy and critical media theory. Within this framework, media is not seen merely as a source of information, but as a space in which ideology, power, and culture intersect. Critical media education seeks to develop among learners the capacity to analyze and deconstruct media messages, encouraging them to become reflective subjects capable of participating in democratic processes (Giroux, 2011; Hall, 1980).

A key component of this model is critical pedagogy, which provides the epistemological and normative basis for understanding education as a political and social practice. The Freirean concept of *conscientização*, or critical consciousness, stresses the importance of reading not only texts but also the world, fostering a critical awareness of power relations and ideological structures that determine media content (Freire, 1970; Freire, Macedo, 1987). In this way, critical media education is not merely a didactic tool, but a normative and emancipatory project aimed at empowering individuals and transforming the relationships among media, education, and society.

Moreover, the model integrates the analysis of cultural studies and critical theory, incorporating concepts such as hegemony, representation, and encoding/decoding (Gramsci, 1971; Hall, 1980). This approach makes it possible for critical media education to address not only media content, but also the ways in which it interacts with identity, social norms, and economic and political structures. Through this theoretical combination, the model offers a powerful framework for developing critical citizenship and preparing individuals to challenge dominant media narratives.

In sum, the model of critical media education aims to build a bridge between theory and pedagogical practice by placing critical media analysis at the center of the educational process and helping individuals develop the skills necessary to act as conscious, participatory citizens in society. It represents an important innovation in the field of education, offering a multidimensional perspective that connects pedagogy, media, and democracy.

Within UNESCO's framework, Media and Information Literacy (MIL) integrates critical access, evaluation, and creation of media and information across platforms, explicitly linking literacy to democratic participation and social responsibility (UNESCO, 2011).

Aim and contribution. This article makes three specific contributions: (i) it clarifies the epistemological status of Critical Media Education (CME) as a critical paradigm within media and information literacy (MIL), distinct from skill-based or protectionist models; (ii) it synthesizes CME's major theoretical foundations in Freirean critical pedagogy, cultural studies, and critical political economy; and (iii) it increases pedagogical usability through an operational framework (Table 1) that specifies four interrelated dimensions – critical epistemology, textual/discourse critique, political economy and platform critique, and praxis and civic agency – designed to support curriculum work, teacher education, and future empirical validation.

2. Materials and methods

This is a theoretical-conceptual article based on an integrative narrative review and model-building approach. In terms of source material, the analysis draws on peer-reviewed scholarship in media education, information literacy, critical pedagogy, critical media theory, cultural studies, political economy of communication, and platform studies, supplemented by key normative frameworks in the MIL field (e.g., UNESCO, 2011). Methodologically, the article proceeds through (a) conceptual clarification of core constructs (media, information, power, ideology, critical consciousness), (b) theoretical synthesis across traditions (Freirean pedagogy, hegemony and representation, and political economy), and (c) operationalization, whereby the conceptual model is translated into guiding analytical questions and indicative pedagogical practices (Table 1). The outcome is intended as a heuristic for pedagogical design and as a basis for subsequent empirical work rather than as a prescriptive or standardized intervention. This conceptual synthesis is grounded in close reading of foundational texts in critical pedagogy and critical media scholarship, aiming to produce a coherent analytic model and a transferable vocabulary for CME.

3. Discussion

Critical media education develops within a broader tradition of critical pedagogy, media theory, and cultural analysis. Critical education is a powerful concept that has evolved through the different theories and practices of renowned authors. D. Kellner, J. Share (Kellner, Share, 2005) explicitly articulate critical media education as a process that links the ideological analysis of media with democracy and social justice. They are among the authors who formalized the term Critical Media Literacy. These authors understand media education not simply as content analysis, but as a process that cultivates critical awareness of social relations, power, and ideology as conveyed through media. The creation of alternative media (videos, blogs, podcasts) enables learners to challenge dominant narratives, articulate their voice, and connect theory with practice. This process has an emancipatory and transformative character (Kellner, Share, 2007).

Critical media education is a process that includes: the analysis of power relations in media; the examination of ideologies, stereotypes, and exclusions; and the linking of media to issues of race, class, gender, and identity. Unlike neutralist models, this model does not claim absolute objectivity but acknowledges that education is always political.

The model of critical education considers media as a social construct. A key principle of this model is that media does not reflect reality; it constructs it. As D. Buckingham (Buckingham, 2003) emphasizes, media contents are products of editorial choices, economic interests, and cultural contexts. In schools, learners are guided to ask who produced the message, for whom it was created, and what is included and what is excluded. They must understand that media are mediated and ideological structures, and that the capacity to reflect on them is more important than the capacity simply to use them.

The critical model places media in a direct relationship with power. It explores the ways in which media normalizes dominant ideologies, reproduces gender, ethnic, or social stereotypes, and legitimizes unequal relations. Such analysis is essential for the formation of democratic and active citizens. In this model, learners are not passive consumers but active subjects of knowledge. Through discussion, debate, and the production of media content, they develop critical thinking, social awareness, and capacities for civic action.

J. Dewey (Dewey, 1916) conceptualizes education as a democratic process based on experience, reflection, and active participation. For P. Freire (Freire, 1970), education is a political and emancipatory process. He stresses that education should not be a *banking* model, where the learner receives information passively, but dialogical, where knowledge is constructed through critical reflection and interaction. According to him, no media is neutral; it represents economic, ideological, and political interests. He underscores that education is a means of liberating individuals from oppression and calls this process a pedagogy of liberation, which aims to help individuals understand and struggle for social justice by becoming agents of change in their society. His concept of critical consciousness is the epistemological foundation of critical media education. Learners learn to read media texts and to understand the ideological and power relations they represent (Freire, Macedo, 1987). They should develop the ability to read media critically, understanding the ideological and hegemonic relations that influence the production and interpretation of content (Hall, 1980, 1997).

Critical media education is a pedagogical and epistemological paradigm that extends beyond traditional media literacy, aiming not only at developing technical skills of reading and using media, but also at the ability to analyze, deconstruct, and problematize the ideological relations and power that media conveys (Buckingham, 2003; Kellner, Share, 2007). This model has deep roots in critical pedagogy, critical media theory, and cultural studies, and offers a theoretical framework for emancipatory and civic education.

At the center of CME stands P. Freire (Freire, 1970), whose critical pedagogy conceptualizes education as a political and emancipatory practice. Freire criticizes the banking model of education, where learners are treated as passive depositories of information, and proposes a dialogical relationship between teacher and learner, where knowledge is constructed collectively.

The Freirean concept of critical consciousness implies a transition from a naïve and passive consciousness, which takes reality as given, to a critical consciousness that understands reality as a social and historical product (Freire, 1970; Freire, Macedo, 1987). Within CME, this concept is operationalized as a critical reading of media, focusing on the ways in which media information produces, reproduces, and naturalizes power relations.

H. Giroux (Giroux, 2011) extends Freirean ideas by understanding education as a cultural and political practice that shapes identities and as a capacity for critical action in society. Media is seen as a space where ideology is produced and where individuals must develop critical skills to analyze and challenge dominant narratives. Giroux emphasizes the importance of dialogue and media production as a way of developing critical citizenship.

Another dimension of CME's theoretical basis derives from critical media theory and cultural studies. S. Hall (Hall, 1980; Hall, 1997) proposes the concept of encoding/decoding, whereby media messages are encoded by producers and may be decoded in different ways by audiences: they may accept, negotiate, or oppose the message. This framework is crucial for critical media education because learners learn to read media critically and reflexively, identifying ideological and hegemonic relations.

D. Kellner, J. Share (Kellner, Share, 2007) further develop the idea of Critical Media Literacy, stressing that media education should not be limited to analysis but should include the active production of media as a means of cultivating critical skills and active citizenship. Critical media skills include recognizing the ideological, economic, and cultural influences of media, as well as the capacity to produce content that challenges dominant narratives. D. Buckingham (Buckingham, 2003) emphasizes that traditional media literacy approaches are limited because they focus primarily on technical or protective skills. He proposes a broader approach in which critical analysis, interpretation, and cultural discussion are more important than merely using media.

The theoretical foundation of CME also includes macro-social analysis of media. Critical theorists such as T.W. Adorno, M. Horkheimer (Adorno, Horkheimer, 2002) and A. Gramsci (Gramsci, 1971) argue that media is part of the culture industry and functions as a mechanism for reproducing cultural hegemony. Critical media education aims to expose these structures, helping learners understand how media messages may reproduce social inequalities and the ideological norms of society.

An important element of the theoretical basis is the link between CME and democracy and critical citizenship. Critical pedagogues argue that the ability to read and analyze media is a necessary condition for active participation in society (Biesta, 2011; Giroux, 2011). Learners develop not only analytical skills, but also the capacity to make informed decisions, to deliberate in the public sphere, and to contribute to social transformation (Habermas, 1989).

This gives critical media education a normative and emancipatory dimension, positioning it as a pedagogical, cultural, and social practice that goes beyond formal and technological instruction.

In the context of contemporary societies mediated by media and digital technologies, media no longer represents merely an information channel, but a central arena for the production of meanings, identities, and power relations. Consequently, media education cannot be confined to technical skills or superficial content analysis; it requires a critical approach that addresses the ideological, economic, and political structures that shape media.

The model of critical media education conceptualizes media as an ideological text and education as a political process, where the goal is not adaptation to the existing media order, but social awareness and emancipation. Critical education seeks the development of critical consciousness and the linkage of reflection to transformative action (praxis), making the educational subject aware of the power structures that shape their life (Freire, 1985). It is grounded in the aim of empowering individuals to deconstruct media discourses, understand power relations, and act as active subjects in social transformation (Kellner, Share, 2007).

Social media are not merely communication tools but systems built upon the logic of connectivity, data, and algorithms (van Dijck, 2013). Critical media education, in this sense, should help individuals understand that digital interactions are mediated by corporate interests and invisible mechanisms of power. N. Couldry, U.A. Mejias (Couldry, Mejias, 2019) argue that digital platforms represent a new form of colonizing power, in which human experience is systematically converted into data for economic gain. In this sense, critical education must go beyond content analysis and include an examination of the technological and economic infrastructures that structure contemporary communication.

The model of critical education is a transformative approach to schooling that emphasizes social liberation, the analysis of power, and the role of education in transforming society. It frames education as a practice that challenges dominant systems and power structures and encourages individuals to develop a critical consciousness of society, culture, and politics. Such education teaches one to understand who creates information, why they create it, and what interests stand

behind it; it analyzes how images, language, symbolism, etc., are used to influence public thought; it teaches how to recognize the ideological orientations of different information sources; it trains individuals to be vigilant against disinformation and propaganda; and, finally, it aims to empower citizens to be more engaged, informed, and responsible in their use of media and information.

Media operates through a propaganda model, in which the political and economic interests of elites filter information and limit the pluralism of public debate (Herman, Chomsky, 1988). From this perspective, critical education should develop the capacity to identify the mechanisms of manipulation and selection of information, making media analysis a central component of civic formation. The model of critical education concerns the development of analytical and critical skills to understand, analyze, and evaluate information coming from different sources. It requires individuals to have the ability to critique media and the information it provides, to understand how messages may be manipulated, and to develop a more informed and reflective approach to media.

Schools, as part of power structures, employ various techniques to control and discipline learners' bodies and minds in order to make them conform to social norms. Traditional methods of schooling treat learners as passive, learning to obey and not to question or participate in the learning process. The teacher is the one who deposits knowledge in learners' minds, who have no opportunity to challenge or analyze the information given to them. This one-way process of knowledge transmission is a form of domination that helps maintain the social and economic status quo. Critical media education should focus on analyzing how media is produced, circulates, and is interpreted within specific social and economic contexts, rather than merely protecting learners from the risks of digital media. Learners should be treated as active subjects of interpretation, capable of reflection and critical debate (Buckingham, 2015).

Schools are not neutral institutions, but cultural spaces where dominant ideologies are produced and contested. Critical education should empower learners to understand how power operates through culture and knowledge, turning them into active political subjects (Giroux, 1983). Schools focus on tests, not on critical thinking. Learners learn to choose the correct answers, not to analyze and reason.

The model of critical education is a process of interaction and dialogue, where knowledge is not transmitted solely from teacher to learners, but a shared process of meaning-making is created. Teacher and learner are not positioned in different relations of power; rather, they create a common space in which meanings can be challenged and new meanings can be produced. Education should be an engaged and active process in which learners and teachers help one another to understand and challenge structures of power and domination. Learning should be thoroughly connected to real-life experiences, and learners should develop the capacity to analyze and reflect on these experiences. Education should help learners develop a critical consciousness of their reality and of the structures of injustice that surround them (Freire, 1970).

M.W. Apple (Apple, 2004) places critical education at the center of the analysis of ideology and curriculum, arguing that what is included as legitimate knowledge in school reflects specific social and political interests. Critical education must render visible the mechanisms through which the educational system contributes to the reproduction of class and cultural inequalities. This position is of particular importance for critical media education because media, like the curriculum, selects and hierarchizes meanings, directly shaping social consciousness. L. Masterman (Masterman, 1985) emphasizes that learners must understand that media is a social and ideological construction, and that critical education should develop analytical skills that allow them to deconstruct media messages and the interests behind them.

The model of critical education is linked to the idea of an education that encourages individuals to challenge systems of power and injustice. Learning is connected to their efforts to change social and political reality.

Schools are not only places where knowledge is transmitted, but also spaces where learners can develop a profound understanding of the world and engage in clear critiques of systems that keep them oppressed. Learning is a space where deep social transformations can occur, enabling individuals to stand against oppression and to create an egalitarian society (hooks, 1994). In critical media education, media is treated as a social text to be read and deconstructed; learners are not passive consumers, but dialogical subjects; and media analysis is connected to everyday life experiences and structural injustices.

H. Marcuse (Marcuse, 1964) argues that mass culture and media contribute to the creation of a one-dimensional consciousness, which restricts critical thinking and social resistance. From this

perspective, critical education has the function of preserving and developing the capacity for negative and critical thought, opposing the ideological conformism of advanced industrial societies. For H. Giroux (Giroux, 1992), media, art, and popular culture are powerful forms of informal education that directly influence the formation of identity and citizenship. Critical education, in this sense, should analyze and intervene in these cultural spaces, helping individuals move beyond borders ideologically and develop a critical consciousness toward dominant discourses. Media education must be fundamentally critical and not protective or moralizing (Masterman, 1985).

An important contribution to critical media education comes from British cultural studies, especially from S. Hall (Hall, 1980). The concept of encoding and decoding emphasizes that media messages do not have fixed meanings but are negotiable and are interpreted depending on the audience's social and cultural positioning.

Critical media education analyzes the representation of gender, race, class, and ethnicity; stereotypes and the normalization of power; and the ways in which identities are constructed through media discourses. According to D. Kellner, J. Share (Kellner, Share, 2007), the critical model of media education differs from liberal or functionalist approaches because media is not neutral; it is produced within ideological and economic structures; every media text is constructed – reality is not reflected but constructed; media reproduces power relations through representation and silence; audiences are active but socially positioned; and the goal of education is emancipation and social action.

A central component of critical media education is the analysis of ideology. This includes identifying the political and economic interests behind messages, analyzing dominant narratives, and deconstructing media common sense (Gramsci, 1971). N. Fairclough (Fairclough, 1995) emphasizes the importance of critical discourse analysis as a tool for understanding how media language produces and legitimizes power.

The critical model pays particular attention to ownership structures and to the logic of the media market. According to R.W. McChesney (McChesney, 2008), commercial media is dependent on the interests of capital and advertising, which directly affects content. Critical media education analyzes the concentration of media ownership, the influence of advertising, and the relations among media, politics, and corporations. Unlike traditional approaches, the critical model stresses the importance of learners' media production not merely as a technical skill, but as a political act and an expression of resistance. According to D. Buckingham (Buckingham, 2003), the creation of alternative media helps develop critical awareness, challenge dominant narratives, and build marginalized voices.

Digital platforms function as structures of exploitation of users' labor and data. Critical education, in this context, should cultivate skills for understanding and challenging these new forms of economic and ideological domination (Fuchs, 2014). In the context of these platforms, critical media education extends its focus toward algorithms and the control of visibility, surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2019), disinformation, and digital manipulation. This positions the critical model as a form of epistemic and civic resistance to neoliberal logics of information.

Recent Q1 scholarship strengthens the argument that Critical Media Education should be understood as more than skills training within media and information literacy. E.W. Austin and S. Domgaard (Austin, Domgaard, 2024) reformulate media literacy as a theory of change linked to message interpretation, while N. Valle, P. Zhao, D. Freed, K. Gorton, A.B. Chapman, A.L. Shea, N.N. Bazarova (Valle et al., 2025) synthesize critical social media literacy as a framework built around inquiry, reflection, and action. L. Pangrazio (Pangrazio, 2026) questions whether AI literacy can be reduced to technical competence, and A. Levido (Levido, 2024) shows that media education must move beyond technical skills even in primary classrooms. N. Ni Shuilleabhain, E. Rich, S. Fullagar (Ni Shuilleabhain et al., 2023) further demonstrate that digital media literacy must also address embodiment, affect, and social norms.

Recent empirical and policy-oriented studies also reinforce the practical relevance of CME. L. Römer, M. Supa, V. Hodbod' (Römer et al., 2023) connect media literacy education with civic participation among disadvantaged youth; G. Polizzi, J. D'Arcy, R. Harris, S. Yates, F. Yeoman (Polizzi et al., 2025) show that media literacy provision in the United Kingdom remains fragmented and uneven; S. Livingstone, R.S. Jessen, M. Stoilova, L.I. Stănicke, R. Graham, E. Staksrud, T. Jensen (Livingstone et al., 2025) introduce the idea of platform literacy as a necessary response to algorithmic risk; and S. Qian, C. Shen, J. Zhang (Qian et al., 2023) demonstrate that brief digital interventions can strengthen verification practices in social media environments.

Contemporary communication research also suggests that critical media education must link meaning-making, structural critique, and behavioral resilience. H. Cho, C.J. Carpenter, W. Li (Cho et al., 2025) show through meta-analysis that media literacy interventions produce consistent positive effects, while O. Kuru (Kuru, 2025) differentiates literacy training from inoculation strategies against misinformation. A. Sadza, S. Daalmans, E. Rozendaal, M. Buijzen (Sadza et al., 2024) demonstrate that adolescents are capable of critical deconstructions of mediated risk, though not automatically. Taken together, this recent literature supports the central claim of this article: CME advances MIL when textual critique, structural platform analysis, and civic praxis are combined within one coherent pedagogical model.

Critical education, built on Freire's critical pedagogy and his successors, aims at the liberation of the individual through critical consciousness. Although it offers considerable advantages, the critical model requires teachers trained in critical theory; it may be perceived as ideological or politicizing; and it is difficult to integrate into standardized curricula. D. Buckingham (Buckingham, 2015) warns that critical education must avoid moralization and preserve space for multiple interpretations. Nevertheless, an important risk is the high level of theoretical abstraction, which often makes the model difficult to operationalize in concrete teaching practices (Biesta, 2010).

Critical education is often perceived as political or ideological, which may provoke resistance from educational institutions and policy-makers. H. Giroux (Giroux, 2011) argues that critical pedagogy risks being marginalized or neutralized in neoliberal educational systems. Another limitation relates to the strong emphasis on individual consciousness-raising, underestimating the fact that critical consciousness does not automatically guarantee social action or structural change (Biesta, 2010).

To preserve the educational legitimacy of CME and to mitigate the risk of moralization, three procedural safeguards can be made explicit in classroom implementation: procedural pluralism, which prioritizes the quality of reasoning, evidence use, and interpretive justification over ideological conformity; reflexivity, which makes assumptions and positionalities discussable and models the revision of claims in light of counter-arguments; and dialogic ethics, which sustains space for disagreement and negotiated readings while connecting critique to democratic deliberation and participation.

4. Results

To reduce the risk of theoretical abstraction and to align CME with conventional expectations for conceptual scholarship in education and MIL research, this section presents the model as an analytic-practical framework that links core dimensions to guiding questions and indicative pedagogical moves. The framework is intended as a heuristic for curriculum design, teacher education, and subsequent empirical validation.

Table 1. Operational framework for Critical Media Education (CME)

Dimension	Guiding analytical questions	Pedagogical enactment and indicative outcomes
1) Critical epistemology (knowledge, authority, truth claims)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What counts as evidence and who is authorized to define “truth”? – Which assumptions are treated as “common sense” and which voices are marginalized? – How do institutional routines and professional norms shape credibility? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Source and evidence triangulation; comparison of outlets and genres. – Dialogic problem-posing discussion and reason-giving. – Outcomes: epistemic vigilance, reflexivity, justified judgment.
2) Textual/discourse critique (representation, framing, ideology)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How is the issue framed? Which metaphors, categories, and emotions are mobilized? – Who is represented, how, and with what stereotypes, silences, or exclusions? – What dominant, negotiated, or oppositional readings are possible (Hall)? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Close reading, framing analysis, and CDA-informed examination of language/image (Fairclough). – Mapping stereotypes and omissions; comparing alternative framings. – Outcomes: interpretive competence, ideological critique, recognition of hegemony.

Dimension	Guiding analytical questions	Pedagogical enactment and indicative outcomes
3) Political economy and platform critique (ownership, algorithms, datafication)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Who owns the outlet/platform and how is attention monetized? – How do advertising, metrics, and algorithmic curation shape visibility? – What data is extracted and how does commodification/surveillance operate? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Ownership and funding mapping; “follow-the-money” media analysis (Herman, Chomsky; McChesney; Mosco). – Platform walkthroughs: feed observation, data trail reflection. – Outcomes: structural literacy, awareness of infrastructural power.
4) Praxis and civic agency (media production, participation, democracy)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How can critique be translated into responsible action in the public sphere? – What counter-narratives or alternative media can be produced? – How can deliberation remain plural, dialogic, and non-indoctrinating? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Participatory media production (e.g., podcasts, blogs, video essays) linked to community issues. – Classroom deliberation and civic projects. – Outcomes: civic agency, democratic participation, collective problem-solving.

The four dimensions are analytically distinct but intended to be used in combination: epistemic critique and discourse analysis are linked to structural platform analysis and to praxis-oriented production that supports civic participation.

5. Conclusion

By specifying CME's core dimensions and normative commitments, the article advances media and information literacy beyond skills-based or protectionist framings and provides a structured framework for analyzing mediated power while informing emancipatory pedagogical practice in media-saturated societies.

The model of critical media education represents a complex theoretical framework that interweaves critical pedagogy, media theory, and political philosophy. It shifts the focus from protection to emancipation, from consumption to production, from passivity to critical action. As such, it offers a robust theoretical foundation for research that seeks to understand and transform the relationship among media, education, and power.

The theoretical treatment above allows the derivation of several fundamental conclusions that consolidate the conceptual basis of critical media education as a field of study and pedagogy.

Critical media education cannot be reduced to an expanded form of media literacy; rather, it should be understood as an independent critical paradigm built on the assumption that education and media are intrinsically political processes. Media is not a neutral instrument of information, but a space where meanings, identities, and power relations are produced, which makes its analysis indispensable within democratic education.

Critical pedagogy constitutes the epistemological foundation of this model by providing the key concepts of critical consciousness, dialogue, and the active subject. The Freirean concept of *conscientização* proves particularly important for critical media education because it enables the transition from a passive relationship with media content to a reflective and analytical positioning toward dominant discourses.

The treatment shows that critical media education aims not only at the deconstruction of ideologies present in media, but also at the development of capacities for autonomous judgment and active participation in the public sphere. In this sense, it rejects both pedagogical neutrality and moralization or ideological indoctrination, focusing instead on building the critical capacities of the educational subject (Habermas, 1989).

The analysis underscores that pedagogical dialogue and the collective production of knowledge are essential elements for operationalizing critical media education. The learner is not treated as a passive consumer of media messages, but as a subject who interprets, negotiates, and potentially challenges the meanings produced by media.

The model of critical media education represents a deep, reflective, and transformative approach that goes beyond technical and protective skills. By integrating critical pedagogy, media

theory, and emancipatory practice, this model aims to form individuals capable of understanding, challenging, and reshaping mediated and social reality.

Critical media education emerges as an emancipatory project that closely links education with democracy, critical citizenship, and social justice. Under conditions of the dominance of digital media and the intensification of symbolic power, this model constitutes a necessary theoretical and pedagogical response to contemporary challenges, opening the way for further theoretical and empirical developments in the field of education and media studies.

This study is intentionally theoretical and does not provide empirical testing of the proposed operational framework. Future work should therefore examine how the dimensions in [Table 1](#) can be enacted across educational levels and cultural contexts and how they relate to outcomes such as critical judgment, epistemic vigilance, and civic participation. Methodologically, this could be pursued through classroom-based design studies, qualitative analyses of dialogic practice, and mixed-method evaluations of learners' interpretive and production capacities.

A second research priority concerns implementation conditions: teacher professional learning, curriculum constraints, and institutional cultures that may facilitate or neutralize critical pedagogy. Studying these conditions is essential for distinguishing between the normative aspirations of CME and the concrete possibilities of pedagogical practice.

This theoretical article received no external funding. No new data were created or analyzed.

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