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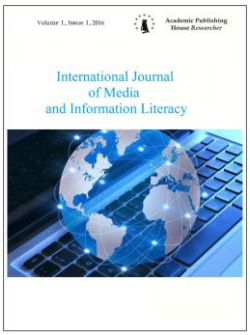

Media Literacy Education in English as a Foreign Language Classroom

Hanae Ait Hattani [a, *]

[a] Sidi Mohamed Benabdelah University, Faculty of Arts and Human Sciences Sais Fes, Morocco

Abstract

Media has become an inseparable part of our lives whether we are children, young people, or adults; we all have our share of media-related exposure on a daily basis. Being literate in the 21st century requires a change in pedagogy of the current education system. Thus, teachers perceive a need for media literacy education in their classrooms. Including media literacy education as part of the school curriculum is imperative as a way to challenge students' critical and creative skills in order to assimilate the diverse codes involved in the contemporary media system. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to examine the manifestation of media literacy education in the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classroom by focusing on EFL teachers' ML perceptions and classroom practices. This study relies on a qualitative methodology; structured interviews with EFL teachers of secondary school. The findings show that the Moroccan teachers of EFL agree that media literacy is not recognized as an official and fundamental part of the national curriculum. Besides, this study presumes that the Moroccan education system is not offering to both educators and learners the necessary requirements in order to realize a working and fruitful media literacy project.

Keywords: media literacy, media education, approach, curriculum, classroom practice, interventions, teaching-learning, training, outcomes, challenges.

1. Introduction

Media literacy is considered a necessary approach to education and lifelong learning. It is a new trend of advancement that promises quality education. However, media literacy in Morocco is still in its infancy and a subject that is rarely taught in schools in any formal way. Therefore, this paper addresses media literacy in the Moroccan educational scene, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom in particular. Using qualitative structured interviews, the purpose of this study was to explore the views of EFL teachers on media literacy education and the extent to which the latter in displayed in their classroom context.

This study is guided by two research questions:

How do EFL teachers perceive media literacy in education?

How is media literacy manifested in an EFL classroom?

The rationale underlying teaching media literacy in formal educational settings as fundamental part of the curriculum emerges from students' increasingly media consumption patterns. Education today should no longer be limited to the traditional skills employed to

* Corresponding author
E-mail addresses: aithanae@gmail.com (H.Ait Hattani)

understand alphabets and words in the print. Students need to be able to "read" and "write" messages using symbols in a myriad of forms (Buckingham, 2003a). Every practice requires particular skills. Therefore, the school curriculum ought to update its content and make relevance from the media messages for effective learning purposes

Despite the promising outcomes of media literacy and the growing need to integrate it as part of the education system, progress to develop the field is still facing challenges especially at the level of classroom practices (Kubey, 1998). Over decades, schools have seldom given importance to people's experience with popular culture and have even called for rejecting its contents deemed inappropriate and harmful. Hobbs (2004) confirms that teachers negatively perceive the relationship between media and the teaching-learning operation. However, educators such as Buckingham (2003a, 2005, 2007b) and Jenkins et al. (2009) argue that schooling is the first factor supposed to undertake this problem of disparity in media and technology use. Integrating media literacy in the classroom practices is supposed to take advantage of students' out-of-school experiences with popular culture in their in-school learning. It is meant to introduce a large framework for developing the person's critical and creative competencies, in addition to empowering their access to different media forms in a more rational and informed way. Teaching students about media literacy skills and promoting their use in both formal and informal education gives rise to their understanding and enjoyment of the nature of the mass media they are daily and constantly exposed to. Media literacy is strengthening the public capacity to fully participate in society as both critical consumers and active producers (Hobbs, 2010).

Hobbs (2005a) confirms that media literacy education movement has rapidly gained ground within the K-12 curriculum as a set of prerequisite skills for learning. However, methods for implementing media literacy know a considerable variation from one place to the other. The literature confirms that among the most intriguing issues related to media literacy education was the way media should be taught in educational settings. Since its beginning in the early 20th century, the historical evolution of media literacy has known continuous debates among scholars and educators (Kamerer, 2013). They were focusing on determining whether media literacy should be taught as an independent subject or as an infused cross-curricular subject, in what grades it should be taught, and how to evaluate it.

Media literacy professionals highlighted the potent role media literacy is playing when integrated within the fundamental curriculum. For instance, Buckingham (2003a) mentions that media literacy is considered an inseparable and stimulating element within the existing curriculum. He says "advocates of media education have often argued that it should be seen as an element of all curriculum subjects" (Buckingham, 2003a: 89). Moreover, Hobbs (2005b) claims that media literacy can be applied across all grade levels and within any subject area, such as social sciences, language, arts, history, health education, communication, and sciences. Other partisans of media literacy as a cross-curricular approach suggested that infusing media literacy within other subjects helps students to better understand and be engaged in the media activities even if the teacher does not have enough qualification and training in the field (Scheibe & Rogow, 2008). This inclusion, as explained by Hobbs (1998), results in the enhancement of the teaching and learning process overall.

The media literacy approach is mainly concerned with stimulating the cognitive and critical thinking skills of individuals. Since "cognition and language development are closely related" (Shangarffam & Mamipour, 2011: 119), it is important to discuss media literacy within language education. Introducing media literacy in a foreign language teaching environment is deemed essential to provide additional language input and increase learners' understanding. Hobbs (2004) affirms that since the 1960s, English schools and departments have been the first to encourage the study of mass media. English language teachers in particular are likely to go beyond the traditional patterns of teaching by incorporating new classroom practices, including popular culture, to increase their students' language proficiency and production (Quinlisk, 2003). When students are asked to recall their media experiences in educational settings they tend to be more motivated to master the linguistic knowledge. Buckingham (2003a) refers to this as the process of "democratization"; he defines it as "a process whereby students' out-of-school cultures are gradually recognized as valid and worthy of consideration in the school curriculum" (p. 9).

Moreover, the inclusion of media literacy interventions in the English language classroom allows educators to better evaluate their learners' skills such as comprehension, vocabulary building and speaking (Hobbs & Frost, 2003). For example, the majority of students while asked to

communicate using a language different from their mother tongue like English they tend to feel more reluctant and less confident. However, relying on the wide variety of media forms using language, sound, imagery and multimedia technology, educators can easily help students to autonomously develop their language skills. As Masterman (1985) points out, the media literacy approach is mainly concerned with learners' sense of "superiority". Adopting media literacy in the English language curriculum encourages learners' participation and engagement as it allows them to use their familiar media contents in order to express themselves as active, autonomous and responsible agents.

2. Materials and methods

This part deals with the implemented research methodology employed to collect and analyze data in this study. First, it describes the overall research design including the sampling procedure, research setting and data collection instruments. The second section presents a brief view on the analysis and interpretation process.

This paper relies on a qualitative research method which is structured interviewing. Qualitative interviews aim at garnering a wide range of EFL teachers' perspectives relating to media literacy and the main ML classroom practices. Structured interview is used for more involvement and commitment from interviewees in addition to the organization of a high degree of data comparison (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011).

Before embarking on interviewing respondents, the latter were asked to give informed consent explaining the importance of their feedback to the research in question. Some teachers expressed their agreement to answer to questions immediately. Some others were reluctant but they finally accepted to respond. In total, 14 EFL teachers were interviewed. Confidentiality of the data was maintained and respondents' names were not included as part of the survey procedure.

Participants were selected based on a non-probability sampling method. The interviewees were teachers of English in secondary school. The sample size was 14 where 8 were females and 6 males (see table 1).

Table 1. Participants Gender Distribution

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	6	42.85 %
Female	8	57.14 %

Respondent teachers belong to 4 randomly selected secondary schools located in Fez city. Gaining access to these institutions was achieved after a required procedure. An authorization was needed from the head of each school, and another authorization from the Delegation of National Education of Fez-Boulemane Region. Interviews were administered in March, 2016 and were between 30 and 40 minutes long.

Interviews, after being conducted with the 14 EFL teachers, were transcribed and typed into Microsoft Word. Subsequently, each question within the interviews was analyzed. The interview questions analysis focused on coding and categorizing patterns of the data to identify meanings and themes. The purpose behind this process is to formulate a coherent structure of data and ensuring reliability.

3. Discussion

The available literature reveals that empirical research on the concerns and implementation of media literacy education is scarce, while there is an abundance of theoretical scholarship about the potential benefits of integrating it in the school system (Hobbs, 2004). Besides, at the current stage, media literacy is not yet incorporated in the Moroccan national syllabus. Thus, this study is an attempt to investigate the extent to which media literacy is included in the Moroccan curriculum as part of the EFL teaching practice.

The overall findings indicate the secondary level teachers' awareness of the prominence of teaching about media literacy. Because of the emergence of high culture and students' proliferating exposure to media-saturated environment, respondents involved in this study believed in the value

and effectiveness of media literacy education and reported their concern and motivation towards integrating it in their classroom performance. As Masterman (1985) states in the introduction of his book *Teaching the Media,* the high rate of media consumption, the rapid expansion of media industries in contemporary societies, the increasing importance of visual communication, and the fast-growing need of educating students to meet the future requirements are what evoked the development of media education programs.

According to this study, education in Morocco needs to go beyond the classical pedagogical practices and most importantly, to update the curriculum content. As far as EFL syllabus is concerned, the integration of media literacy is still ineffective. All interviewed EFL teachers had prior experience teaching about the media as part of their curriculum. However, almost all of them mentioned that this kind of lessons aimed at teaching about the media explicitly target protectionist and defensive goals. Masterman (1985) rejects the notion of "defensiveness" against media harmful effects. He argues that media education is an analytical and evaluative study where recipients learn to go beyond inoculating against media perils to exposing themselves as active and free users able to go in depth into every media text. Similarly, EFL teachers stated that focusing on teaching about media advantages and disadvantages is by no means promoting learners' media learning and critical thinking abilities. In the same vein, for the National Curriculum Reform in China, Xu (2016) recommends that media literacy education curriculum should be developed to serve students' lifelong learning. He stresses that this objective can only be achieved if there is a connection between the curriculum content and students' interest and experience beyond the existing textbook. Students need to recognize the significance of the media messages they are submerged with and critically explore the implicit aspects before the explicit ones.

In fact, respondents referred to promoting students' critical and creative skills as the most intriguing objective of integrating media literacy in the curriculum. Additionally, they confirmed that teaching media literacy in EFL classes helps in engaging students inside and outside the classroom and enhancing their learning abilities. In line with this, Buckingham (1993) says that teaching media literacy within other subject areas enhances students learning and makes their instructive experience more interesting and meaningful. As mentioned in the literature, integrating media literacy as a cross-curricular subject in English classrooms helps teachers to discern and measure their students' learning skills (Hobbs & Frost, 2003). Besides, Scheibe and Rogow (2012) point out that teaching English Language Arts (ELA) can be supported by implementing media literacy. They explain that ELA teachers can teach about grammatical, literary and writing components using popular media contents.

On the other hand, despite their rejection of the defensive approach, respondents believed in the role of media literacy to prevent students from the manipulation and falsity of some harmful media contents. In a world where media messages are constantly bombarding the lives of children and youth, media literacy is needed to protect them and show them the way to be critical and wise consumers. Developing wise and healthy media consumers is one the first purposes behind establishing media literacy education (Considine, 2002).

As for media literacy practices in the EFL classroom, EFL teachers are motivated to support media literacy. Though they were uncertain about the effective way to integrate it into their teaching, EFL teachers expressed their high motive to teach media literacy. They explained that they are ready to improve their classroom performance as they assume how much such activities are able to increase their students' motivation and academic achievement. Teachers reveal that media literacy appears to some extent in their instructional settings through some activities like discussing media contents. In a similar study, Yates (1997) found that more than half of secondary school teachers adapt media literacy into their teaching through spontaneous discussion of general TV viewing, analysis of advertisements, and use of print media. According to Yates, teachers have always an opportunity to integrate media literacy education in their classroom through discussions which help their students to work on their media reception skills by developing their critical thinking abilities. Integrating media literacy constructs in teaching and learning contexts encourage the constructivist and inquiry-based approaches as it creates opportunities for learners to actively participate in knowledge building instead of being passive recipients.

On the other hand, according to media scholars the effective implementation of media literacy education has encountered a number of barriers due to the lack of a conventional foothold in school settings (Kubey, 1998; Martens, 2010). EFL teachers participating in this study agree on their

professional incompetency to teach media literacy. Interviewees, in fact, stated that the absence of trainings is among the first challenging obstacles to the integration of media literacy in Moroccan schools either as an independent subject or a cross-curricular one. Generally speaking, teachers often incorporate media literacy while teaching their subject area without having any formal training. According to Hobbs (2004: 43-44) "many teachers "discover" media literacy as an instructional tool simply from trying to motivate students' attention and interest in learning, without any awareness that a body of 25 years of scholarship and theory exists on the subject". An effective media literacy education requires an on-going training and support (Hart, 1992). Teachers need a professional education in media literacy in order to gain academic knowledge and practical and technological skills needed to perform a successful teaching and learning.

Furthermore, EFL teachers referred to another obstacle that impedes the development of media literacy education in the country. From interviewees' claims, Moroccan classrooms lack the primary media literacy resources and technological equipments including computer hardware, internet connection, data projectors, TV monitors among other devices. Hobbs and Frost (1998) in their study "Instructional practices in media literacy education and their impact on students learning" affirm that media literacy education in the United States have always been considered as a matter of materials development and curriculum. In China, Lee, Cheung and Cheung (2016) worked on the same issue of media literacy incorporation in the Chinese educational system and found that the major obstacles to teaching media literacy are due to school support and school workload. These challenges include expense, access to materials and resources, training and professional development for teachers, and constraints of curriculum and time overload.

Ultimately, as respondents suggested at the end of the interview, more support is required to work on planning and promoting the media literacy project in Moroccan educational settings. Developing media literacy education is engaging stakeholders in setting strategic guidelines aimed at implementing and evaluating systematic teaching pedagogies (UNESCO, 2013).

4. Results

In order to investigate how Moroccan EFL teachers perceive media literacy within their classrooms, qualitative method was employed through interviewing 14 EFL teachers.

As a first question, respondents were asked about their familiarity with the term "media literacy" or "media education". The totality of respondents confirmed that they already know about the term. Some respondents explained that it is a new approach to education and the aftermath of globalization, new media and digital culture. They asserted that media literacy is a requirement for the 21st century learning skills which the pubic, mainly children and youth, need to acquire in order to face the current media challenges. Four other teachers pointed out that media literacy has to do with the use of information and communication technology (ICT) inside the classroom by both teachers and students.

Afterward, a question sought to perceive what EFL teachers think about the government efforts to develop media literacy in the education system. The majority of interviewees affirmed that media literacy is something that remains on paper and not yet used in practice. Other teachers said that education in Morocco still relies on the classical teaching methods and considers literacy as the reading and writing skills. On the other hand, few other teachers confirmed that there are some noticeable efforts done by the ministry in this regard. Notably, these teachers agreed on the development of ICT use in the teaching and learning process. Subsequently, as far as EFL syllabus is concerned, teachers were asked about the way they consider media literacy as a cross-curricular subject. All teachers stated that the secondary school textbooks of English cover some units and courses which teach about the media. Some interviewees mentioned that these media lessons are mainly devoted to teaching students about vocabulary related to media and new technology. Besides, more than half of respondents said that teaching about the media in the EFL curriculum is abiding by a protectionist approach through teaching media threats and drawbacks. According to a teacher, the English textbook focuses on asserting in students' mind that media are never innocent and are constructed to transmit intended messages. As it has been mentioned by the majority of EFL teachers, the curriculum is not allowing students to use media contents in order to work on their critical thinking and raise their awareness of what they are constantly receiving.

The second part of the interview emphasized on media literacy practices inside EFL classroom. The majority of teachers believed that media literacy, in spite of its absence from the

Moroccan education system, can be achieved thanks to educators' will and diligence. A teacher said "somehow, it is the instructors themselves that may opt for media literacy classroom interventions by creating an adequate atmosphere, in which students become rather contributors than just passive learners". Among the media literacy activities that respondents incorporate while teaching English are listening to English songs in the classroom, working on print articles and engaging students in writing their own, and discussing TV programs. However, they mentioned that they seldom plan to do so. Only one teacher said that she usually teaches vocabulary through songs. As she added, students seem more interested in the lesson when the teacher changes the usual traditional teaching approaches into new practices using media for instance. Other teachers, however, stated that they are faithful to what is inserted in the textbook and choose to abide by the teaching methods they are familiar with. These teachers explained that they are not against media literacy interventions, but all that they need is a specialized training in addition to equipments. Overall, the majority of teachers agreed on the importance of including media literacy activities while teaching as it motivates students' learning attitudes and improves their linguistic skills namely, speaking, listening, reading and writing in the target foreign language.

Furthermore, respondents were invited to identify the main goals of media literacy education. Teachers confirm that including media literacy in an EFL classroom helps in motivating students and engaging students in learning. Teachers believe that students need new approaches of teaching and learning different from the classical methods they are familiar with. Media literacy integration, according to respondents, creates a classroom dynamics and allows students to better their academic achievements. As a teacher stated:

I usually encourage my students to communicate inside the classroom using English by asking them to share their opinions about a TV program or a movie they watched or any other media text. I can tell you than I feel amazed when I see that they are motivated and involved in interaction despite making some mistakes.

Additionally, teachers state that teaching media literacy promotes students' critical and creative skills. In fact, critical thinking remains the essence of teaching media literacy. It concerns cultivating learners' skills in using media intelligently and autonomously, understanding, analyzing, interpreting and assessing its multiple generated meanings. The communicative and productive skills, on the other hand, empower learners' intellectual, cultural, and civic engagement.

Another question sought to discover what teachers see as the main barriers that face the integration of media literacy in the education system in Morocco in general and EFL in particular. Teachers confirmed that the lack of facilities and educational materials is what mostly challenges the inclusion of media literacy in the Moroccan schools. They asserted that schools suffer from the absence of technical resources. A teacher said that in order to teach media literacy, every classroom should be equipped with a computer, wireless connection, data show, speakers and other necessary devices. The same teacher added that some schools, especially in rural areas, suffer from a poor quality infrastructure and absence of academic inputs. Other teachers identified another challenging issue which is the lack of media literacy training for educators. They said that the media literacy project cannot be realized unless teachers receive specialized training that allows them to effectively deal with the new course.

Finally and before wrapping up the interview, respondents were requested to give some of their additional comments and recommendations in relation to the issue in question. All teachers recommended that the ministry of education and stakeholders need to set up policies and take serious actions that address the media literacy project, and start by investing in providing facilities and training. They suggested a radical change at the level of the syllabus as well as the teaching pedagogies by considering the potent role of teaching about the media at all grade levels. Other teachers called for a strong partnership between home and school in order to give birth to media literate students. They said that students' media access usually starts at home; therefore, media literacy should be based on critically addressing their learners' out of school media experiences.

5. Conclusion

This paper is an attempt to explore the state of media literacy in Moroccan education, the EFL classroom in particular. The results of the qualitative interviews reveal how a small group of secondary school EFL teachers perceives media literacy education in their classrooms. On the basis of the above discussion, we hypothesize that media literacy can regulate students' media use and

exploit it in effective learning and active participation inside an EFL instructional setting. However, stakeholders are not promoting media literacy as an official and fundamental part of the national curriculum. The education system is not offering to educators and learners the necessary requirements in order to realize a working and fruitful media literacy project. Thus, the recommendation part refers to the need to recognize the incorporation of media literacy as a necessary part of basic education by reforming teaching-learning pedagogies as well as providing trainings in the field and digital resources which will serve to prepare skillful 21st century educators.

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Appendix

1- Gender

- Male
- Female

2- Have you ever heard about "media literacy" or "media education"?

3- What does the term "media literacy" imply to you?

4- Does the Moroccan educational system work to integrate media literacy education in schools?

5- Can you explain how?

6- As far as the EFL curriculum is concerned, does it incorporate media literacy as a cross-curricular subject?

7- Can you explain how?

8- As an EFL teacher, have you ever integrated media literacy in your classroom practice? What activities did/do you opt for?

9- What are the main goals behind teaching media literacy in a EFL classroom?

10-In your opinion, what barriers hinder the development of media literacy education in schools and EFL classroom?

11- As a teacher, do you have any additions and/or future recommendations aiming at promoting the field of media literacy within the Moroccan educational system?