

The importance of Media Literacy in the knowledge-base society:

The effectiveness of training in the media literacy skills in Iran

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Abstract

Access for all citizens to invest in the production and dissemination of knowledge and training needed to increase the level of media literacy strategy determines the pace of development is based on knowledge. Lifelong learning in a knowledge society means that it is important to understand how adults learn and also to facilitate learning and promoting life-long thinking about.

Learning from the traditional means of acquiring knowledge. Today it means to learn the skills necessary to join the society of knowledge and cognitive development has evolved. Therefore, education is one of the main processes of Knowledge Society. Information technology, communications and computing have provided new tools to facilitate learning.

In the current era, the media and its wide usage by the adolescents creates the need of acquiring the skills and teaching the media literacy teachings and mastery of such skills to the students. The present research aims at investigating the effectiveness of training in the medial literacy skills of high school students. The present research employed a semi-experimental method. The experimental and control groups comprised 120 individuals studying in the high schools of Kerman city that were selected through cluster sampling in the year of 2013. The control group received one term of 90-minute weekly sessions.

The data gathering tool was a 40-item questionnaire which was administered in the pre-test and post-test. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential

statistics by SPSS software. Results indicated that, the rate of media literacy, four components and its related skills with total average of 2.2 (from 5) is in a weak level. Subsequent to the training, the students in the experimental group scored significantly higher on skills such as usage of media, analysis of media messages, the ability to product and send media messages, critical thinking in using the media and facing the media messages. Based on this, the mean of media literacy reached by 3.64, which is a good level.

Overall, media literacy training is effective in the increase of students' media literacy and it's necessary to include it into the curriculum of the schools.

Keywords: Media literacy, media literacy training, high schools students, analysis of media messages, critical thinking

Introduction

Enabling the students to live in the contemporary era is one of the duties of the institution of educational organization. This institution is regarded as the foundation of development and progress and trains the future designers of the society. Many countries have concluded the media literacy training into the curriculum of their schools; however, no serious action has been employed to include such teachings to introduce such training into the educational curriculum. The contribution of the internal research findings specifically with regard to the students' media literacy is limited and there's great need to investigate the effectiveness of media literacy trainings effect.

The institution of education is the most important part of culture and is mutually related to other institutions and has the duty to respond to the needs of the society and social demands to fulfill its educational mission (the educational national program; 2012, 67). In the documents related to the educational program, media literacy has been emphasized including the strategic evolution document of the formal education of Islamic Republic of Iran. In this document, and in the prospective horizon, the implement of effective management in media environment and helping to deepen and promoting the media literacy and also paving the way for the adequate efficiency of learning environment has been emphasized in this document (strategic evolution document of the formal education, 2010; 34).

Media literacy has undergone different stages. Today, media literacy is more influenced by interactional media and is called as the access and usage of the media, analysis and assessment, production and relationship with media messages and critical thinking. International organization of UNESCO actively tried to support the media education since 1960 and implement it as a world-wide program. Since the middle of 1970s, the topic of media literacy was in the lime light of some countries such as Latin America and European countries such as Italy and Spain and the pioneering country was Canada (Sepasgar, 2005; 118-122).

In the South Africa, media literacy was used to promote the level of general education; moreover, in some of the English speaking countries like Scotland and Australia, media literacy is regarded as a part of language skills training (ibid, 119). Japan employs this concept to critically investigate the media products and

analyze the existing realities of the media (Kuniomi, 2002). In Singapore, the media literacy with focus of critical ability in the media usage has been highlighted. From the perspective of poly technique experts of Singapore, the media literacy is crucial necessity for living in the 21st century (Phang,2005). Potter, one of the pioneers of media literacy argues that, individuals who have media literacy automatically allocate less time to the process of media messages (Potter, 2008).

Media literacy training encompasses cognitive processes that are used in critical thinking. Educational workshops and educational programs of the media, the values, reactions along with recognition (critical audience), anti-media resistance and movement of consumers with focus on the educational program of the media literacy need the cooperation of teachers, managers, experts and parents in order to become successful (Brown, 1998: 44). Moreover, critical perspective is one of the main components of the media literacy that studies the opinions of the owners of media and the economy of media, ethical and political principles about the shaping forces of the contents of the media (Rosenbaun, 2008).

Research has been carried out on the level of media literacy and its effect on the critical skills and active reaction of students with media messages. In the study carried out by Laitsch (2006) on a number of students in the United States of America, it was found that, students who are exposed the TV commercials are vulnerable to their effects. This investigation with presenting media education and comparison of the results and performance of the control group indicated that, media education can decrease and moderate the effects of the advertisement and help the students be critical and wise users of the media.

Hoffman (1999), in an investigation on three hundred American young individuals indicated that, students are not interested in the newspaper and the rate of their studies is limited to the magazines that aim at attracting the young audience. Moreover, the results of the research also indicated that, although they overuse the media, they are not aware of the forming factors of the programs. Moreover, in Singapore, Phang (2005) carried out a survey on 262 young adults aging 17 to 23 years old. Results indicated that, individuals who participated in the media literacy training had higher awareness and more critical thinking as

compared to the individuals who did not. Moreover, the results indicated that, the media literacy of individuals who underwent the media literacy program was in a higher level as compared to the individuals who didn't undergo the training.

Results of the research by Taghi Zadeh (2011) indicated that, the level of media literacy among the high school students of Kerman City is moderate to low and they have limited information on media, possessing and influencing economic and cultural factors. Individuals who do not have planning in their use of the media highly trust the content of the Internet. Research indicates the importance of media literacy training and reminds the necessity of planning educational program. Media literacy refers to the formal and informal, process, content hidden and unhidden trainings that teach the required skills to the learner in order to change his/her tendencies, values and judgments (Maleki, 2010).

There exist various definitions on the topic of media literacy. According to Thoman, (1995) media literacy acts in three layers. The first layer is the importance of personal planning in using the media. The second layer regards more intangible aspects of the media and sheds light onto the deep questions and topics. The third layer is the necessary skills for the critical viewing of the media and these skills deal with the audiences' questions and analysis on the structure of making the message and shaped messages in it (Kovach and Rosenstein, 2005).

Based on this, media literacy is a system of interpretation and preference that is influenced by mental and ethical judgments that shape the media messages (either by access or exploration) and causes the audience to feel more responsible in the selection and usage of the messages (Livingstone and Thumim, 2003). According to Buckingham, the media literacy refers to the knowledge, skills and abilities that are needed for using and interpreting the media (Buckingham, 2010). He believes that, the goal of media literacy is to develop the critical abilities of students.

Media literacy is basically related to the development of critical awareness. It can be claimed that, the process of critical analysis of media enables the students to free themselves from the values and thinking that the media intends to impose on them. Critical awareness, perception and goal are no easy and require the critical ability and being self-reliant (Buckingham, 2010). From the viewpoint of ShokrKhah, media literacy is a kind of perception that is dependent on the ability

based on which, different media can be distinguished from one another and identify the media output. He asserts that, media literacy is a combination of effective efficiency techniques that require obtaining perception and insight into the identification and distinguish of the media (Shokr Khah, 2001).

According to James Potter, media literacy is composed of three blocks including personal resources, knowledge structure and skills. The personal source explains the audience's goals and motivating stimuli in terms of the media in a way that having the audiences with the media can be ranges on a continuum from active to passive. Moreover, the constructs of knowledge include a set of planned information in the memory that are not created by themselves and require attention and regard (Potter, 2008). Potter believes that, in media literacy, we need strong structures of knowledge in five realms including media effects, media contents, media industry, real world and the self. The set of these five realms support the individual against the media. James Potter considers the media literacy as a set of prospective that actively confirms the informational process of the media and analysis of the messages we face (Potter, 2008).

Moreover, organizations and institutions that are active in media literacy are in agreement in four realms of media skills specifically media literacy. These four realms include the access and usage of the media, analysis and evaluation, production and relationship with media literacy and critical thinking (Oxstrand, 2009).

Basic principles in Media Literacy education

Organizations UNESCO, European Commission, European Parliament and many media organizations such as AML¹, CML² and NAMLE³ have many strong statements on what the ability of Media literacy should consist of. The organizations have common objective of Media education in schools that provide Media literacy, which is one of the most important conditions for an active and full citizenship. Media education is part of the fundamental rights of every citizen in the world and teaching will be aimed at children to better understand the world and participate in democratic and cultural life. Media education should aim to develop informed, reflective and involved citizens that are necessary in a democratic society. Media education will aim to give children the ability to effectively use media in the context of democratic rights and civic responsibility. Communicative ability is emphasized, too, which means everything from the creation of media productions using creative, technical, semiotic and social skills to blog and participate in virtual communities. (Oxtrand, 2011:18).

Key Concepts of Media Literacy are:

1. All media are constructions
2. Each person interprets messages differently
3. The media have commercial interests
4. The media contain ideological and value messages
5. Each medium has its own language, style, techniques, codes, conventions and aesthetics
6. The media have commercial implications
7. The media have social and political implications
8. Form and content are closely related in the media (oxtrand, 2009:24-27).

¹The Association for Media Literacy-Canada

² Centre for Media Literacy

³ The National Association for Media Literacy Education - US

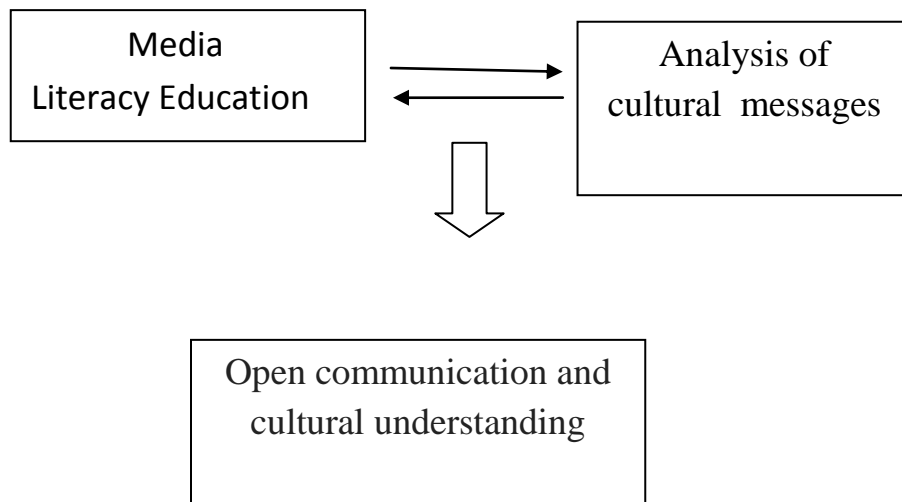


Figure 1 - The theoretical model

Method

The research employed a semi-experimental method. The statistical population included all the students studying in the high schools of Kerman City in 2013, who were selected using cluster sampling. All the first grade students studying in Shahid Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan were selected as the experimental group and all the students of Alborz High school were selected as the control group. The pretest was administered in the beginning of the school year of 2013. The experimental group received one terms of weekly 90-minute sessions and the post-test was carried out in the December of 2013 in both schools. It should be mentioned that, the content of the education was designed and developed based on assessing the needs by the researchers and guidance of the professors in the faculty of social sciences and communication in Allameh Tabataba'i University. This course included training the concept of media literacy with focus on the cultural features of the country.

Analysis of cultural messages includes four variables: Recognition of cultures and ethnicities, Diversity of political views, social and cultural, Cultural flexibility and Critical analyses of the messages. Each of which with ten items and based on Likert scale were assessed. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. To assess the reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach alpha

was used that was equal to .92. On the other hand, the validity of the questionnaire was assessed by some of the professors in the educational sciences, social sciences and communication sciences. Moreover, the socioeconomic status of the students' family was ranges in low, moderate and high levels.

Results and findings

Table 1- demographic properties

Features		Control School		Experimental School		Total	
Gender And Level Of Education	Male High School Students	N	%	N	%	N	%
		120	50	120	50	240	100
Socioeconomic Status	Low	5	4.2	6	5	11	4.6
	Moderate	54	45	50	41.7	104	43.3
	High	61	50.8	64	53.3	125	52.1
Number Of Classes	First Grade Of High School	4	50	4	50	8	100
Grade Point Average				19.30		19.27	

As observed in table 2, 240 male individuals study in four classes of each school the control and experimental high schools were similar in terms of socioeconomic status, number, gender, educational level and grade point average.

Table 2- results of pretest in the experimental and control groups

Variable	Group	Mean	Level	SD	F	Sig
Recognition of cultures and ethnicities	Experimental	2.55	Weak	1.14	.098	.52
	Control	2.50	Weak	1.43		
Diversity of political views, social and cultural	Experimental	2.58	Weak	1.11	.663	.42
	Control	2.55	Weak	1.34		
Cultural flexibility	Experimental	2.32	Weak	1.41	.643	.42
	Control	2.35	Weak	1.37		
Critical analyse of the messages	Experimental	2.40	Weak	1.14	0.801	.41
	Control	2.36	Weak	1.12		
Analysis of cultural messages	Experimental	2.46	Weak	1.30	.568	.45
	Control	2.44	Weak	1.26		

According to the results of table 2, there is no significant difference between the variance of the groups and in terms of the research variables in the pre-test and variances are equal. Therefore, the presumption of the equality of variances is confirmed and both groups are homogenous. Therefore, the level of each variable in each group and in the pre-test is equal.

Table 3- results of posttest in the experimental and control groups

Variable	Stage	SD) (Mean	Level	MD
Recognition of cultures and ethnicities	Group	2.63 (1.16)	Weak-Modarate	0.98
	Experimental	3.61 (1.18)	good	
Diversity of political views, social and cultural	Control	2.62 (1.16)	Weak-Modarate	1.01
	Experimental	3.63(1.02)	good	
Cultural flexibility	Control	2.45 (1.35)	Weak	1.47
	Experimental	3.92(.958)	good	
Critical analyse of the messages	Control	2.78 (1.26)	Moderate	1.01
	Experimental	3.88(.99)	good	
Analysis of cultural messages	Control	2.62(.62)	Weak-Modarate	1.14
	Experimental	3.76(.64)	good	

Hypothesis

The first hypothesis: students who participate in media literacy training will have higher ability in rrecognition of cultures and ethnicities as compared to the individuals who didn't.

Table 4- results of t-test for the comparison of mean of the recognition of cultures and ethnicities in the experimental and control groups

Post-test		number	mean	SD	MD	F	t	sig
Recognition of cultures and ethnicities	Experimental	120	3.61	1.18	1.02	.27	-8.408	.000 p<.01
	Control	120	2.63	1.16				

With regard to the statistical analysis, with value of $t=-8.408$ and level of sign (.000), it can be concluded with 99 percent of confidence that, there exists significant relationship between the experimental and control groups in terms of the recognition of cultures and ethnicities. The mean of the experimental group is higher which indicates that, the educational program has been effective.

The second hypothesis: students who participate in media literacy training will have higher ability in the creation and sending the message as compared to the individuals who didn't.

Table 5- results of independent t-test for the comparison of mean of Diversity of political views, social and cultural in the experimental and control groups

Post-Test		N	M	SD	MD	F	t	Sig
Diversity of political views, social and cultural	Experimental	120	3.63	1.02	1.01	1.45	-6.940	.000 P<.01
	control	120	2.62	1.16				

With regard to the statistical analysis, with value of $t=-6.940$ and level of sign (.000), it can be concluded with 99 percent of confidence that, there exists significant relationship between the experimental and control groups in terms of the Diversity of political views, social and cultural. The mean of the experimental group is higher which indicates that, the educational program has been effective.

The third hypothesis: students who participate in media literacy training will have higher ability in analyzing the message as compared to the individuals who didn't.

Table 6- results of independent t-test for the comparison of mean of Cultural flexibility in the experimental and control groups

Post-Test		N	Mean	SD	MD	F	T	Sig
Cultural flexibility	Experimental	120	3.92	0.958	1.47	2.24	-5.395	0.000
	Control	120	2.45	1.35				

With regard to the statistical analysis, with value of $t=-5.395$ and level of sign (.000), it can be concluded with 99 percent of confidence that, there exists significant relationship between the experimental and control groups in terms of Cultural flexibility. The mean of the experimental group is higher which indicates that, the educational program has been effective.

The fourth hypothesis: students who participate in media literacy training will have higher ability in critical thinking as compared to the individuals who didn't.

Table 7- results of independent t-test for the comparison of mean of Critical analyse of the messages in the experimental and control groups

Post-Test		N	Mean	SD	MD	F	T	Sig
Critical analyse of the messages	Experimental	120	3.88	0.99	1.10	6.94	-7.528	0.000
	Control	120	2.78	1.26				

With regard to the statistical analysis, with value of $t=-7.528$ and level of sign (.000), it can be concluded with 99 percent of confidence that, there exists significant relationship between the experimental and control groups in terms of Critical analyses of the messages. The mean of the experimental group is higher which indicates that, the educational program has been effective.

The fifth hypothesis: students who participate in media literacy training will have higher media literacy as compared to the individuals who didn't.

Table 8- results of independent t-test for the comparison of mean of Analysis of cultural messages in the experimental and control groups

Post-test		N	mean	SD	MD	F	t	sig
Analysis of cultural messages	experimental	120	3.76	0.64	1.14	.91	-11.462	0.000
	control	120	2.62	0.62				

With regard to the statistical analysis, with value of $t=-11.462$ and level of sign (.000), it can be concluded with 99 percent of confidence that, there exists significant relationship between the experimental and control groups in terms of Analysis of cultural messages. The mean of the experimental group is higher which indicates that, the educational program has been effective.

Discussion and conclusion

The media constantly influence people in many ways—cognitively, attitudinally, emotionally, physiologically, behaviorally— both directly as individuals as well as indirectly through other people, institutions, and culture. Therefore, increasing one’s media literacy requires development along several different dimensions.

In an increasingly globalised world, mass media and popular culture have significant potential for both positive and negative impact on young people.

Today with the rise of computer-mediated communication and global interactions, possessing the skills that constitute cultural fluency are essential in order to achieve understanding and acceptance of other cultures. to effective intercultural communication is, “to generate approaches of investigation on how people from different cultures and speaking different languages actually influence each other in specific intercultural contexts” (McGoldrick 2008, 86).

The media can be a powerful tool in communicating cultural awareness and is an important source of cultural production and information.

Media literacy Education can therefore play a vital role in furthering our understanding of ourselves and our own culture in relation to others.

Based on the results of t-test, subsequent to the training, the ability of students who underwent the training in all the four components of Analysis of cultural messages increased as compared to the to the students who didn't participate this training. Put it differently; implementing this course helps students increase the Analysis of cultural messages and its related skills. Overall, the level of Analysis of cultural messages in the participating group promoted from weak to good and the mean increased from 2.46 to 3.76. This difference is significant at 99%. The results are in line with the results of the research carried out by Laitsch (2006) and Phang (2005). They indicated that, media training increases the skills of students in using the media and critical evaluation of media message.

Media literacy advocates argue that the inability to understand our media culture, to critically analyze the media, and to gain access to the media constitutes a systemic problem that although reflected in individuals, is not caused by them. Because both poor health and media illiteracy are systemic problems, the solutions must also be systemic; they are economic, political, and social in scope; and they have regional, national, and global dimensions (Bergsma, 1999).

The results of the first implementation of media literacy training (pre-test), indicating that the level of students' ability in the four skills of cultural messages and media in the present study was to examine is weak.

The level of media literacy in the participating group promoted from weak to good. This difference is significant at 99%.

Based on the research results, the ability of students in a four Analysis of cultural messages involves Recognition of cultures and ethnicities, Diversity of political views, social and cultural, Cultural flexibility and Critical analyse of the messages in the experimental group, increased, and they were at a higher level.

Overall, the level of Analysis of cultural messages in the participating group promoted from weak to good and the mean increased from 2.62 to 3.76. This difference is significant at 99%.

The results are in line with the results of the research carried out by Laitsch (2006) and Phang (2005). They indicated that, media training increases the skills of students in using the media and critical evaluation of media message.

All country needs to follow Media Literacy Education and include Critical media education in their curriculum in Primary schools or even already in Pre-primary schools. If children receive good Media education throughout their time in school, from preschool into adulthood, the children will not only become well-equipped to

cope well in society regardless of their parents' knowledge about the Internet and new media, but also resources to preserve a democratic society. Understanding the cultural messages can strengthen the peace process and reduce the cultural conflicts.

The findings of the present research highlight the importance of the media literacy training at schools as a vital necessity of the current era.

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