



ELSEVIER



CrossMark

Available online at [www.sciencedirect.com](http://www.sciencedirect.com)

ScienceDirect

Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 200 (2015) 192 – 198

---

---

**Procedia**  
Social and Behavioral Sciences

---

---

THE XXVI ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC CONFERENCE, LANGUAGE AND CULTURE, 27–30 October 2015

## Developing Students' Media Literacy in the English Language Teaching Context

Olga S. Dvorghets<sup>a,\*</sup>, Yelena A. Shaturnaya<sup>b</sup><sup>a</sup>*F.M. Dostoyevsky Omsk State University, 55, Mira Prospekt, Omsk, 644077, Russia*<sup>b</sup>*Tomsk State University, 36, Lenin Ave., Tomsk, 634050, Russia*

---

### Abstract

The article centers around the idea of developing students' media literacy through integrating English and American mass media resources (multimedia form) into the English classroom. It is based on teaching experience at Dostoyevsky Omsk State University where the module 'Mass Media Analysis and Interpretation' has been incorporated into the practical course of English language teaching (ELT). According to the suggested approach, multimedia texts analysis and interpretation allow students to access, analyze, and evaluate various kinds of British and American mass media – TV news programs, talk shows, movies, etc. The article is illustrated with recent examples of the mass media incorporated in the media-oriented classroom. The writer shares her own experience of designing methods for media analysis in terms of cultural, political, ideological, and socioeconomic implication.

© 2015 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

Peer-review under responsibility of National Research Tomsk State University.

*Keywords:* Analysis; debates; interpretation; mass media; media-oriented classroom; syllabus

---

### 1. Introduction

Nowadays, it is universally acknowledged that teaching and learning a foreign language cannot be reduced to the direct teaching of linguistic skills like phonology, morphology, vocabulary, and syntax. Today, English teachers face an unequalled challenge: bridging the gap between traditional teaching aimed at developing all kinds of students' listening, reading, speaking and writing, skills, and communicative teaching focused on contextualizing

---

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +7-913-976-6645; +7-3812-317-119; +7-3812-673-579; fax: +7-3812-229-801.

E-mail address: [osdvor@rambler.ru](mailto:osdvor@rambler.ru)

the language (Simpson, Obdaloova, 2014). In order to meet the challenge, teachers should have a well-planned and balanced curriculum motivating students by meaningful and relevant activities. One of the most effective and modern approaches from this perspective would be integrating mass media into the ELT classroom. The approach is based on the concept of weaving media literacy development into the curriculum. While having media literacy as an isolated topic, students may face certain difficulties in their efforts to discuss mass media because they have mastered neither the vocabulary nor proper speaking skills, integration of media literacy into practical course of ELT might provide them with scaffolding support and language input needed to access, analyze, and evaluate various kinds of British and American mass media – TV news programs, talk shows, movies, etc. The development of students' media literacy and through it their critical thinking has become an increasingly important goal across university curricula.

Our search for a course that would not only stimulate students' progress in mastering a foreign language speaking, reading, writing and listening skills but also help them succeed in training their media literacy, encourage their critical thinking has led us to a special project. It is based on the Module 'Mass Media Analysis and Interpretation' which has been incorporated into the practical course of ELT at Dostoyevsky Omsk State University.

Is the integrated media literacy classroom a good space to develop students' media literacy? Is multimedia a definite facilitator in developing critical thinking? Is it effective for promoting students' English learning? The paper is trying to draw attention and offer insights into the problem.

## 2. Methodology and analysis

### 2.1. Research Design

Media literacy is typically defined as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and produce communication in a variety of forms (The Module 'Mass Media Analysis and Interpretation' incorporated into the practical course of ELT defines media very broadly, including books, newspapers, magazines, videos, movies, recorded music, and everything available via the Internet. Special emphasis, though, is to be put on multimedia.

According to the suggested approach, the module is designed to develop students' skills to interpret mass media messages as well as awareness of the reasons and methods of how these messages are often misrepresented, misinterpreted, and, as a result, might become instruments for manipulating the audience.

The whole project endorses the *Core Principles for Media Literacy Education in the United States*, developed by the National Association for Media Literacy Education in 2007, which state that media literacy education: requires active inquiry and critical thinking about the messages we receive and create; expands the concepts of literacy (i.e., reading and writing) to include all forms of media; builds and reinforces skills for learners of all ages, and like print literacy, those skills necessitate integrated, interactive and repeated practice; develops informed, reflective and engaged participants essential for a democratic society; affirms that people use their individual skills, beliefs and experiences to construct their own meanings from media messages (Scheibe & Rogow, 2008).

Additional factors should also be considered: teaching media literacy is especially important in university classrooms because students, as media consumers, tend to be more influenced in subtle but far-reaching ways by the media they encounter than adults. Besides, "media presentations convey cumulative messages that *shape, reflect,* and *reinforce* attitudes, values, behaviors, preoccupations, and myths that define a culture" (Silverblatt, 2001). This occurs in part because media consumers, who have limited time and attention, automatically process the bulk of the messages that they encounter rather than expending the effort that would be required to evaluate them (Potter, 2004).

In this paper we examined how with the Module designed within the present project, students may have a better understanding of the mass media information, if the syllabus, methods of teaching and support materials in the media-oriented ELT classroom could enhance their critical thinking and media literacy.

Media literate students are supposed to have a better understanding of the information that they receive and are more likely to consider its quality and assumptions (Facione, 2013). They are capable of making judgments and grounding them in good reasons (Halpern, 2003). They are flexible in their thinking and capable of revising their own judgments when confronted with new ideas and information (Facione, 2013). As a result, they are better able to succeed when faced with problems that have complex causes or debatable solutions (Halpern, 2003).

The aim of our research is:

- to design a course/module incorporated into the practical English curriculum to infuse media literacy into the core content;
- to evaluate the effectiveness of mass media analysis and interpretation in the ELT classroom for developing students' media literacy and enhancing their language performance.

More specifically, our research addressed the following questions:

1. Do students report higher levels of judgments and grounding them in good reasons after completing the Module?
2. When confronted with the mass media received from different sources, are they more flexible in their thinking than the students who were not enrolled in the project?
3. As a result of the work in the media-oriented ELT classroom, did the students improve their foreign language performance? What advantages (if any) did the Module give in terms of speaking, listening, and reading skills?

## 2.2. Subject matter

The Module 'Mass Media Analysis and Interpretation' at Dostoyevsky Omsk State University is intended for Foreign Languages Department students, V – VII semesters. It has been successfully integrated into the humanities curricula ranging from critical reading to media studies.

Apart from developing students' linguistic competence, the Module syllabus design strategies are built around the idea of providing students with media literacy skills. Following from this, the syllabus is supposed to be both (media education) task-oriented and language-oriented. Since it is an integrated course, principles of logic, reasoning, argumentation are of paramount importance. Alongside with language skills traditionally developed in an ELT classroom, the media literacy syllabus Module design suggested here presupposes the study of topics from a wide range of disciplines. Most of them are associated with journalism as well as global studies – a blend of political, economic, international, ecological and cultural relations and processes influencing the world. Media literacy entails "approaches that make us aware of how the media construct meanings, influence and educate audiences, and impose their messages and values" (Kellner & Share, 2007)

It's a common practice with similar integrated courses to first provide knowledge on critical thinking skills and then ask students to deploy it to deepen intellectual engagement with course materials.

A well-designed Module syllabus would also include lectures giving knowledge of media genres, production contexts, and case studies so that students have a set of facts, concepts, and theories that they can draw on as they practice critical interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and explanation. (Wade, 2014).

When planning and designing the Module 'Mass Media Analysis and Interpretation' syllabus for the project, the following principles were involved:

- it should deal with cultural attitudes and values, topics and situations preferably with a high degree of visual support;
- it should reflect debatable/thought-provoking/various/crucial concepts and issues reflecting modern situation in society as well as students' needs and interests;
- it should be focused on language areas as well as media literacy skills development (systems, functions, input and output);
- the linguistic items of the study materials (particular grammar structures, language functions, or colloquial expressions) presented in the classroom as well as their speech delivery (speech rate, clarity of speech, and accent) and density of language (the amount of language spoken over the course of a particular sequence) should be an important factor to consider when selecting a sequence for classroom viewing/interpretation;
- the study materials should be flexible, informative, and encouraging to students to ensure greater engagement.

Typically, the syllabus is set in advance. However, due to specificity of most mass media constituting the Module subject matter which is to be constantly updated, it should be designed in such a way as to allow space to adopt lessons or deviate from the initial plan. As the course is in progress, the syllabus might evolve in accordance with either the teacher's judgment or students' interests. Since 'What to include?' is one of the most crucial questions as far as the Module subject matter is concerned, it should be noted that with some groups with a degree of maturity from students, we could afford to have not only a prescriptive-prefabricated syllabus but also formative negotiable one encouraging students to choose themes to adapt the syllabus, offering materials and putting forward their own ideas. Besides, the more chances we have to get students collaborate on the syllabus of the Module, the more chances are there that they would be engaged in mass media critical analysis and interpretation.

The mass media resources applied to the course are varied and flexible. There are innumerable examples of mass media used for more than two-year teaching experience of the Module. Among the latest materials being accessed, analyzed, and evaluated during the course there are various kinds of British and American mass media – TV news programs, talk shows, movies, etc. The ones which have been most popular in the students' classroom, there are commencement speeches (e.g. speeches delivered by Steve Jobs, Stanford, 2005, J. K. Rowling, Harvard University, 2008, Neil Gaiman, University of the Arts, 2012, Bill Gates, Harvard, 2014 and others), the TV programs on BBC "Hard Talk" (e.g. interviews of Stephen Sackur with American linguist, philosopher Noam Chomsky, British actor and campaigner Jeremy Irons, Russian State Duma deputy A. Lugovoi, press secretary of the Russian president D. Peskov etc.), news programs on CNN and others.

### 2.3. *Methods and ways*

While the use of mass media in the language class is still something of a novelty, it's worth pointing out that the application of traditional communicative teaching techniques to the students' media literacy development can, with a bit of imagination, flexibility, and bias towards mass media evaluation, critical analysis and interpretation, pay handsome returns. The teaching strategy proposed and used within the project follows the classical model of pre-viewing, while-viewing and after-viewing activities.

Pre-viewing discussion can be approached in the same fashion as prereading. Some tasks may include predicting from the title of the program shown in the class, problem resolution, information gap exercise. A topic or theme of the mass media sequence can be presented and discussed by the group, e.g. class presentation of the program on BBC One *Hardtalk* where the journalist Stephen Sackur discusses 'a world of issues' with Jeremy Irons, 'an actor and campaigner'. The presentation begins with an overview of in-depth, hard hitting programs like *Hardtalk* as well as the interviewee's background. According to the journalist, he is an actor 'with very strong opinions'.

While-viewing activities: since the purpose of the course is to teach students to analyze mass media, not to increase their word power, emphasis on students' acquiring a substantial number of lexical items should be downplayed. However, some lines of the dialogue crucial to understanding the interview should be reviewed and explained. Some recurrent vocabulary items may be necessary to a complete understanding of certain episodes or particular characters. It might be also to the point to clarify the key points, to give certain references to culture or explain certain behaviors unfamiliar to students, e.g. the notions of 'a libertarian recognizing the necessity of regulations' interpreted by Jeremy Irons (*Hardtalk* with Stephen Sackur and Jeremy Irons), some public pronouncements of the actor, etc. To determine the students' overall understanding of the story line the teacher should do the comprehension check periodically.

After-viewing activities used within the project most frequently included project work, debates, writing critical reviews, role plays. All of them presupposed tasks aimed at critical judgments, solving problems of all kinds, reflection tasks. After-viewing activities for *Hardtalk* with Jeremy Irons may include tasks, like:

- role play the program *Hardtalk* providing an in-depth, hard-hitting interview with a newsworthy personality;
- role play a similar program on most burning issue of modern life on Russian TV under the same title (*Hard Talk*);
- make presentation of some other *Hardtalk* interviews from any walk of life covering some sensitive topic (s);
- debate the problems raised in the *Hardtalk* with Jeremy Irons ('Liberty and regulations').

For after-viewing activities irrespective of the mass media resource nature viewed in the classroom with students, using debates seems to be the most challenging way to encourage class interaction. Not only it helps to engage students in exploring the issue being discussed. Apart from other reasons: reinforcing vocabulary, developing speaking fluency, building speaking confidence, etc, having debates in the classroom is a great teaching tool across several subjects. What matters most for the present research, students' participation in debates is rewarding for practicing argumentation, it develops their higher-order critical thinking skills of evaluation and analysis.

The topics for the Module debates included a wide range of issues covering the mass media topics watched in the classroom; they should be divisive enough in popular culture to spark a debate. Among after-viewing activities examples of the latest global and social issues/topics for the debates are: questionable/debatable statements; TV and Internet survey; being a celebrity; controversial topics; giving opinions about technology; negotiation philosophy; cool jobs; environmental issues; others.

The integrated mass media ELT classroom may be a good space to teach critical analysis of the media texts covering current news programs. For this project, teaching strategies to teach critical analysis of the news blocks offer two approaches:

- approach 1: viewing, analyzing different presentation modes of the same topic on various television channels;
- approach 2: viewing, exploring news blocks with a further in-depth coverage of top stories.

Approach 1: viewing, decoding, evaluating, and analyzing news blocks of the same topic on various television channels may produce excellent results. For instance, let us show how the same story is treated differently on CNN Student News, ABC, TBS. Unfolding the story of the White House intruder who managed to jump the fence outside the White House starts with the CNN Student News, October 2, 2014. The anchor Karl Azus informs CNN viewers that the intruder dares run across the lawn and get well inside the building before officers tackle him. As a result, the leader of the U.S. Secret Service quits: Director Julia Pierson's resignation follows the calls of some lawmakers, who consider the intrusion 'a failure of command on director Pierson's part'. The story continues the following day when ABC reporter mentions another incident happening within 24 hours. The American liberal political and social internet commentary follows as the host Cent Uygur, *the Young Turks*, introduces two opposite points of view on what happens: 'they don't do their job, they even didn't kill the intruder!' and 'anyway, they stopped him!' BrookeBCNN contributes to the incident with 'judge orders mental testing for the White House suspect!' The host Cent Uygur definitely takes the view of the officers' advocates. The story concludes as an American comedian and late-night talk show *CONAN* on TBS O'Brien ensures 'we keep finding up more and more about the guy who broke in the White House'. According to him, the story could be nothing else but a comedy: the secret service admit that the intruder 'got farther into White House that we had originally thought'. More than that: he took a bunch of photos in the White House, showing him play with the nuclear launch button, taking pictures with Joe Biden, Vice President of the USA, some others. Role plays, projects, debates generated in the given context presuppose the analysis of how news is interpreted by various people/on different TV channels

Approach 2: viewing, making a news block presentation with a further in-depth coverage of top stories. For instance, the news block presentation of BBC starts with an overview and analysis of the news and the news mode on this channel. Then detailed analysis of the most noteworthy event follows. For instance, an overview and analysis of BBC One Minute News, September 2014 is followed by an in-depth coverage of the top story about the Scotland's Independence referendum. The news about the Referendum on BBC, September 17, 2014 is followed by viewing David Cameron's speech begging Scotland not to split (February 2014) and then live coverage and results on the BBC and CNN news blocks the following day. Students' project as an after viewing activity allows them to make their own inferences, develop their arguments. Most popular topics that generate debate in the context are: 'The pros and cons of Scottish independence', 'The rejection of Scottish independence ends one debate but sparks new questions about the devolution of power in the UK', and others.

### 3. Discussion of results

To evaluate the effectiveness of mass media analysis and interpretation in the media-oriented classroom of the

Module incorporated into the practical course of ELT and to answer the questions set in 2.1 of the present paper, the initial and exit surveys were conducted at the beginning and after the Module (Semesters V, VII). In both cases the students were assessed as media viewers on their final product – participation in debates. At the end of each semester (V –VII), instructor and student interviews were conducted to examine students' and instructors' perceived advantages and disadvantages of the teaching process. When designing the critical thinking assignments to measure the students' media literacy, we referred to fundamental, powerful and substantive media, concepts and events, which the students had a chance to deal with during their study. Apart from the knowledge of different mass media format, all of them required reasoned judgment within conflicting attitudes and systems or complex questions requiring proof and reasoning within one system.

The main criteria used for evaluating students' media literacy performance used for the project are as follows:

- knowledge of various media formats specificity;
- accurate identification of the core issues;
- understanding depth and significance of the problem;
- ability to make deep inferences consistent with each other;
- improved foreign language performance;
- demonstration of high levels of critical judgment, interpretation skills.

The research has indicated significant enhancement of the students' critical thinking ability and media literacy. Of the 107 students enrolled in the Module, 102 completed the surveys. On the basis of improved English language performance, 88 reported dramatic progress concerning their knowledge of various media format specificity of the English - speaking and Russian environment as well as deep insight into the discussed issues and problems. They showed their growing ability to make inferences, demonstrated higher levels of critical judgment, interpretation skills as media viewers taking part in the debates compared to the initial surveys. Lack of similar performance on the survey of the remaining 14 students could be partially explained either by poor attendance of classes or the failure to do home assignments aimed at viewing mass media outside the class. Having completed the Module, all the students showed they were more flexible in their thinking than the students who were not enrolled in the project.

Instructor and student interviews conducted to examine students' and instructors' perceived advantages and disadvantages of the study/teaching within the Module. identified their unanimous intense enjoyment, interest and approval of it. Both students and teachers valued the efficiency of the Module in terms of media literacy. However, according to the students, the main drawback of the Module is the home assignment policy which prescribes excessive amount of mass media viewing outside the class. Similarly, most course instructors participating in the Module confessed they would prefer preparation for the course not be so time-consuming having to spend long hours updating their mass media awareness.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Developing students' media literacy through integrating English and American mass media resources (multimedia form) into the English classroom is a challenging, demanding task for the language teacher who must possess interdisciplinary knowledge and keep developing it alongside with the students. Both the teacher and the students have to fully understand that media literacy is essential for successful cross-cultural communication. In this article, I propose that integrating mass media into the ELT classroom by means of the Module 'Mass Media Analysis and Interpretation' incorporated into the practical course of ELT is a noteworthy form of weaving students' media literacy development. The results confirm that far from being a simple matter, the media-oriented classroom integrated approach suggested here could be employed in practical English courses across a wide range of English levels to ensure higher level of students' media literacy. Aware of the problems described in the previous section of the paper, I should conclude that my personal experience of working for the Module was really hard work but at the same time highly rewarding and I am delighted to have gained some skills as a syllabus designer. In perspective, a model for including media literacy in the high(er) school curricula at various grade levels could be suggested.

## References

- Daniels, J. (2012). Transforming student engagement through documentary and critical media literacy. *Theory in Action*, 5, 5-29.
- Facione, P. A. (2013). *Critical Thinking: What it is and why it counts*. Millbrae, CA: Measured Reasons and the California Academic Press.
- Halpern, D. F. (2003). *Thought and Knowledge: An introduction to critical thinking* (4th ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Kellner, D. & Share, J. (2007). Critical media literacy, democracy, and the reconstruction of education. In D. Macedo & S. R. Steinberg (Eds.), *Media literacy: A reader* (pp.3-23). New York: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Potter, J. W. (2004). *Theory of Media Literacy: A cognitive approach*. London: Sage.
- Savu, E. (2014). The 'intercultural teacher' – a new response to the teaching career. *Procedia – Social and behavioral Sciences*, 128, 11 – 116.
- Scheibe, S., & Rogow, F. (2008). *Basic ways to integrate media literacy and critical thinking* (3<sup>rd</sup> edn). Project LookSharp, Ithaca College 1119, NY 14850 – 7290.
- Silverblatt, A. (2001). *Media literacy: Keys to interpreting media messages* (2nd ed.). Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Simpson, R., & Obdalova, O. (2014). New Technologies in Higher Education – ICT Skills or Digital Literacy? *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 154, 105-111.
- Wade, W. P. (2014). Bridging critical thinking and media literacy through integrated courses. *CDTL Brief*, 17(2), 2-5.