

## **Exploring EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Media Literacy in Kazakhstan**

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### **Abstract**

Developing media literacy has emerged as a key requirement in our rapidly evolving world. Particularly, the incorporation of media literacy into the secondary school curriculum in Kazakhstan is perceived to have a long-term impact on the employment prospects of graduates and aligns with the country's multi-vector policy. Consequently, teachers recognize the imperative to foster media literacy in their classrooms. The integration of media literacy into the existing school curriculum holds profound importance, challenging students' critical thinking skills, creativity, and functional literacy. This study aims to explore the development of media literacy within English as a Foreign Language (hereinafter, EFL) classrooms, concentrating on teachers' perceptions and challenges related to media literacy. Utilizing a qualitative approach, the research entails conducting semi-structured interviews with EFL teachers in Kazakhstan. This study is based on in-depth, semi-structured interviews with fifteen EFL teachers in schools in Kazakhstan. The findings reveal that, despite certain barriers, EFL teachers acknowledge the necessity of incorporating media literacy components into their classrooms. The tension associated with teaching media literacy manifests in decisions related to selecting appropriate resources, adopting effective approaches, and navigating the attitudes of other education stakeholders. The research outcomes contribute to filling the current gap in studies within this domain, offering practical insights for teachers working in similar environments.

**Keywords:** *Educational policy, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), media literacy pedagogy, media literacy, teaching tensions.*

### **Introduction**

The incorporation of media literacy into teacher education is essential, as it fosters an understanding of modern culture and establishes connections among educators, institutions, and society (Gambino, 2023; Knowles et al., 2023; Schwarz, 2001). Numerous studies emphasize the importance of integrating media literacy with language to develop teacher educators' media literacy, considering it a crucial factor in socialization and intercultural interaction (Felini, 2014; Meehan et al., 2015; Pederson, 2023; Schwarz, 2001). The pressing need to include media literacy

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in both school and trainer school curricula underscores the pivotal role of media in addressing various societal issues (Diano et al., 2023; Özel, 2023; Torres & Mercado, 2006). Despite a substantial increase in support for media literacy among teachers and teacher educators in the past decade, a limited number of educators appear to incorporate media literacy components into curriculum development and planning.

In a world where the media permeates every aspect of our daily lives, the importance of media literacy cannot be overstated. From social networks and billboards to commercials, television, and the Internet, we are inundated with media messages (England et al., 2023; Quinlisk, 2003). This pervasive presence underscores the need for educators to acknowledge its profound impact on students' perceptions and attitudes. It is imperative for teachers to integrate media literacy into language learning curricula, empowering students to critically analyze and respond to media messages (Krueger & Christel, 2001; Ulu-Aslan & Baş, 2023). Initiatives such as changes in teacher training programs, curriculum reform, and public awareness campaigns aim to equip individuals with the necessary skills to evaluate and engage with media content critically. Moreover, collaborative efforts between government agencies, educational institutions, and civil society organizations underscore Kazakhstan's commitment to fostering comprehensive media literacy education (Shaikenova & Morozova, 2019). These endeavors reflect Kazakhstan's determination to empower its citizens, enabling them to navigate the complexities of today's media landscape effectively and participate fully in society.

The concept and purpose of media literacy align closely with the notion of education as a means of socialization for active involvement in a democratic society (Tyner, 2014). Teachers who possess media literacy skills are better equipped to facilitate their students' self-directed learning journeys and foster a culture of lifelong learning. In studies focusing on optimizing the impact of professional development for teachers, secondary school teachers emerge as pivotal figures within the learning environment (Hattie, 2007; Pischetola et al., 2023). This is particularly evident among EFL teachers, who have a specific interest in fostering connections within the international community (Korona, 2020). Advocacy for media literacy has experienced an important surge as teachers and teacher educators actively advocate for its integration into educational programming and curricula. Torres and Mercado (2006) introduced media education as a methodology aimed at

empowering novices to amplify the voices of diverse individuals. Stein and Prewett (2009) suggested the incorporation of media literacy education into social studies instruction. Morrell (2011) underscored the importance of organizing English language arts teachers to mentor high school students in various research and writing formats, encompassing popular media mediums such as music and video.

Teacher education programs must prioritize adequately preparing future teachers to thrive in diverse school environments. Particularly, teacher education programs should furnish teachers with the requisite skills and strategies to cater to the varied learning styles, abilities, backgrounds, and needs of their students (Meehan et al., 2015). Gay (2018) contends that participants in both in-service and pre-service teacher training programs must be equipped to adeptly manage classrooms, with the overarching aim of fostering classrooms grounded in democratic principles and inclusion. Research underscores apprehensions regarding media representations, which frequently overlook ethnic minorities' accurate portrayal and perpetuate stereotypes, thus sidestepping broader structural inequalities.

In his 2003 publication, Masterman discussed the crucial role of teachers in nurturing the holistic development of children, emphasizing the cultivation of their confidence and critical maturity. Additionally, educators play a pivotal role in fostering critical thinking skills among children (Baker, 2010), as well as diversifying instructional approaches by utilizing a variety of resources tailored to accommodate students' diverse learning preferences (Schwarz, 2001). Recognizing representation as the cornerstone of media literacy, and further acknowledging that media literacy proficiency largely hinges upon grasping this concept, Canadian pioneers in media literacy launched the world's first English-speaking jurisdiction in 1989 to mandate media literacy in its curriculum. Consequently, the foundational concept of media literacy, centered around inquiry, emerges as paramount, with distinct central tenets (Ministry of Education, 1989; Salmon, 2023).

The closure of schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic had long-term consequences, including a drop in the learning outcomes of the students, and promoted inequality between urban schools, rural schools, and disadvantaged schools (Durrani et al., 2023). The pandemic revealed various shortcuts in the education system; a lack of digital devices and the internet connection were

claimed to be the major problems (Easterbrook et al., 2023; Haser et al., 2022). Students from elite schools could attend their lessons synchronously remotely; students from public schools were relatively successful in attending online sessions, but students from remote rural areas were deprived of substantial distance learning (Palau et al., 2021). In the case of English language learning, students observed overuse of non-interactive ways of teaching, one-way connections, and delayed feedback and responses from teachers to students (Hajar & Manan, 2023). Resources were a barrier to effective media literacy, as teachers struggled to access necessary materials and equipment, despite the course's introduction of low-budget options (Harvey et al., 2022). Not all students have equal access to technology or reliable internet connections at home. The OECD (2015) report suggests that students from low-income households or rural areas may have limited access to digital devices or high-speed internet. In examining school resources, they addressed the promotion of greater use of ICT (ibid.).

Existing research indicates that the term "media literacy" is notably complex due to the absence of a universally agreed-upon definition (Potter, 2022). Various interpretations of this term differ both in minor details and more important aspects. Nevertheless, even slight discrepancies in meaning can pose challenges when educators possess divergent perceptions of identical concepts. Consequently, prior to embarking on broader-scale initiatives to enhance students' media literacy, it is imperative to examine teachers' comprehension of the concept. Fundamental issues arise in framing the conceptual framework for media literacy education (Hobbs & Jensen, 2009). Thus, it is key to building an understanding of media literacy incorporation into teachers' classroom practices within educational settings, which I explain below.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Drawing upon the extant literature, the conceptual framework of this study unfolds as follows: a delineation of the local educational landscape and the reform initiatives pertinent to fostering media literacy in Kazakhstan is presented. Secondly, an elucidation of the concept of media literacy as a pivotal educational construct is undertaken. Thirdly, the teacher provided. Consequently, a comprehensive review of scholarly works across diverse domains, such as educational policy, pedagogical methodologies, and teacher training, is conducted.

## **Educational Context and Reforms in Kazakhstan**

Composite concepts and modern perspectives of literacy have evolved in response to changing socio-political, financial, and technological landscapes, alongside the demands and challenges of contemporary times, particularly within the workforce and broader society (Moore, 2008). This interdisciplinary approach has been further developed, with all nations endorsing the Sustainable Development Goals for 2016–2030 during a UN summit in September 2015 (Chasek, 2016). This pivotal session outlined an agenda for global transformation across various facets of human development, encapsulated in 17 overarching goals. According to the UN Common Country Analysis and multi-stakeholder meetings, Kazakhstan aims to prioritize the Cooperation Framework within the national priorities outlined in the forward-thinking Strategy Kazakhstan-2050 (Terzyan, 2020). These priorities are interconnected and align with the attainment of "quality education," as articulated in Sustainable Development Goal 4. The UN SD Cooperation Framework of Kazakhstan for 2021-2025 affirms the government's commitment to fostering an inclusive community by promoting enhanced access to social protection for children, while also empowering women, men, and young people with knowledge and life competencies to make informed and responsible choices (Hausmann et al., 2023). This initiative aims to cultivate a system of values conducive to promoting sustainable development within Kazakhstan.

As a relatively young nation, Kazakhstan embarked on a journey of far-reaching ambitions upon gaining independence in 1991. Guided by several long-term development strategies, the government initiated the implementation of a trilingual education system within secondary schools. The multilingual character of Kazakhstan's society is a product of historical, political, economic, and geographic factors. Trilingualism emerged as a central objective, encapsulated in the country's trilingual policy, which serves as a cornerstone for achieving proficiency in all three designated languages (Tlemissov et al., 2020). The Kazakh language holds the status of the official state language of the Republic of Kazakhstan (L1), while Russian serves as the second language (L2), functioning as the secondary dominant language and commonly used for inter-ethnic communication. English is introduced as a foreign language (FL), not extensively utilized within the learner's immediate social environment but important for cross-cultural communication. English instruction typically commences in the third year of schooling and continues until the completion of secondary education. In many high schools, English serves as the medium of

instruction for science subjects, a practice that extends into universities. The incorporation of English as a medium of instruction (hereinafter, EMI) has been integrated into the educational system and is now prevalent in over half of the nation's schools (Seitzhanova et al., 2015; Kuzembayeva et al., 2018).

In alignment with this objective, governmental officials have sanctioned a program aimed at modernizing teacher education and refining curricular content. Under the purview of the newly established state program, the primary objectives encompass enhancing Kazakhstan's educational and scientific standing on a global scale, thereby amplifying its economic contribution, while simultaneously advocating for education grounded in universal values, which are specified in the national document called the State Program of Education Development 2025 (Sarmurzin et al., 2021). Furthermore, it is noteworthy that media literacy components have been integrated into the curriculum, specifically within the elective course "Global Competencies," which is offered across schools in Kazakhstan. The incorporation of external resources alongside traditional educational tools, coupled with the cultivation of interdisciplinary and meta-disciplinary competencies—such as hypothesis formulation, information analysis, and synthesis—will serve to bolster students' functional literacy levels (Veryaev et al., 2013). Consequently, it can be inferred that the core tenets of the revised English language program emphasize the acquisition of functional literacy through language proficiency in authentic contexts and adeptness in processing information sourced from diverse media formats.

### **Media Literacy**

The concept of media is multifaceted and subject to diverse interpretations. Historically, scholars have encompassed various forms within this umbrella term, including print and traditional media (Scribner & Cole, 1981; Sinatra, 1986), television (Bowes, 1990; Masterman, 1983), multimedia and visual media including static and animated pictures (Arnheim & Messaris, 1996; Buckingham, 1993; Kress, 2003), digital media (Hartley, 2010; Kilinc et al., 2023; Tyner, 1998), popular culture (Quinlisk, 2003), and the array of technologies facilitating information dissemination (Brown, 2006; Hobbs & Frost, 1998; Potter, 2010). Notably, the National Association for Media Literacy Education (2007) underscores that literacy, in its essence, encompasses proficiency across all media forms (p. 3). Scheibe and Rogow (2011) delineate key characteristics of mass media,

emphasizing that such media convey messages through visual, linguistic, and auditory means; are crafted for broad dissemination using technological mediums; and crucially, the creators of media content are often spatially distanced from their recipients (p. 14). This study does not seek to prioritize or disregard specific media forms; rather, its aim lies in exploring individuals' perceptions of how to navigate their environment and cultivate independent thinking.

The impact of mass media on contemporary society is contingent upon the prevailing social, economic, and intellectual landscapes within which media outlets operate. Consequently, the selection of media by audiences is affected by various social factors (Boneu et al., 1966). These factors encompass diverse themes, with particular emphasis on the language employed, thereby becoming a pivotal consideration. The conceptualization of media literacy as a societal phenomenon underscores its technical, cognitive, and sociocultural dimensions (Yeh & Swinehart, 2020). Technical competencies encompass practical skills such as accessing, creating, navigating, organizing, and disseminating social media content (Daneels & Vanwynsberghe, 2017). Cognitive competencies pertain to the capacity to comprehend, evaluate, and critically analyze social media content for its credibility and applicability (Christ & Abreu, 2020; Daneels & Vanwynsberghe, 2017). Sociocultural pragmatics entails an understanding of the social and cultural norms governing behavior, values, beliefs, language usage, and discourses in media contexts (Yeh & Swinehart, 2020). Tandoc et al. (2021) posit the existence of four distinct competencies—technical, social, privacy-related, and informational—central to the function of social media literacy. Recent research has identified three primary themes concerning teachers' perspectives on media literacy: evaluating the authenticity of media messages, engaging with media content, and addressing safety concerns (Von Gillern et al., 2024). I now explain how these notions are reflected in teacher education and teachers' classroom practices.

### **Teaching Media Literacy in EFL Classrooms**

In recent decades, scholarly discourse on educational reform has underscored the pivotal role of teachers in driving such reforms forward (Fullan, 2013; Hargreaves & Evans, 1998; Schleicher, 2016). The quality of teachers' practice has been identified as the foremost determinant of system success and students' achievements (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Ibda et al., 2023). However,

enabling teachers to integrate media literacy into their classroom practice may pose certain challenges.

First, media literacy holds important merit within teacher education due to its capacity to foster an understanding of contemporary culture and facilitate connections among educators, institutions, and society (Schwarz, 2001). Numerous studies underscore the importance of integrating language and media literacy to cultivate the media literacy skills of teacher educators, thereby enhancing socialization and fostering intercultural interaction (Felini, 2014; Meehan et al., 2015; Schwarz, 2001). The pressing need to incorporate media literacy into university and teacher education curricula underscores the pivotal role of media in shaping societal discourse and influencing various aspects of communal life (Torres & Mercado, 2006). Despite the burgeoning support for media literacy among teachers and teacher educators in recent years, there remains a notable discrepancy wherein few educators effectively integrate media literacy components into curriculum development and planning. Consequently, teacher education stands poised as a critical avenue for advancing media literacy within schools in Kazakhstan.

Second, studies advocate for the benefits of integrating media literacy into teacher education (Robertson & Hughes, 2011; Schmeichel et al., 2018; Weninger et al., 2017). However, concerns regarding the challenges associated with teaching media literacy persist. These include insufficient knowledge among educators, limitations imposed by standardized curriculum and its potential for overload, an unsupportive professional environment, and low levels of teacher capacity and confidence (Mason et al., 2018; Schmeichel et al., 2018; Stoddard, 2014). Notably, student teachers have expressed a lack of self-efficacy regarding their knowledge and skills in teaching media literacy (Schmeichel et al., 2018). Teachers also face difficulties in integrating media literacy tasks into course content due to the absence of media literacy components within the curriculum. Furthermore, a shallow understanding of the fundamental principles of media literacy exacerbates the stress experienced by teachers, particularly when media literacy education is not part of their own academic preparation (Meehan et al., 2015).

Thereby, professional development may play pivotal roles in mitigating teachers' challenges and enhancing their integration of media literacy within the classroom. Both in-service and pre-service



teachers encounter hurdles in this integration process, including lesson planning, adapting content, navigating institutional social and cultural contexts, and bolstering content knowledge (Manfra & Holmes, 2020). The contentious nature of media topics further complicates the development of students' media literacy (Robertson & Hughes, 2011). Similarly, UNESCO reports underscore that media literacy should be integrated into adult education, professional development, and lifelong learning curricula (Moore, 2008). Teachers' apprehensions regarding potential ideological or political biases, as well as their own confirmation biases, may impede the implementation of media literacy education (Schmeichel et al., 2018). Addressing these concerns requires concerted efforts within teacher education institutes, including the design of appropriate instructional tools and the enhancement of faculty members' capabilities.

Research indicates that faculty members across various disciplines recognize the importance of cultivating students' media literacy (Dolanbay, 2022; Schmidt, 2012). Faculty members have the potential to equip students for continuous learning, as media literacy is an ongoing developmental process (Buckingham, 1993; Masterman, 2003; Stix & Jolls, 2020). For example, English courses could incorporate lessons on the power of language and storytelling across different media platforms (Curry-Tash, 1998; Schwarz, 2001), encouraging students to generate multimedia content as part of their conventional classroom activities. Employing a blend of inquiry and reflection is widely endorsed as the fundamental method for integrating media literacy into any curriculum. A constructivist approach to media analysis advocates for an engaging acquisition of media literacy skills (Scheibe & Rogow, 2012).

### **The aim of the study**

The rationale and importance of this study derive from the imperative to comprehend the perspectives of EFL teachers in secondary schools across Kazakhstan regarding pivotal concepts such as "media," "literacy," and "media literacy". By seeking teachers' viewpoints on these key concepts, the study aims to highlight prevailing understandings, potential misconceptions, and areas of ambiguity. Moreover, through an exploration of the potential challenges that EFL learners might encounter in the adoption of media literacy, the study aims to reveal barriers that could impede effective pedagogical practices. These challenges may encompass insufficient resources, limited training opportunities, inadequate institutional support, as well as cultural and linguistic

obstacles. Addressing these barriers assumes paramount importance for the successful integration of media literacy into the curriculum. By gaining a deeper insight into how teachers conceptualize the key tenets of media literacy, it becomes feasible to pinpoint existing issues and propose avenues for further research. Thereby, this study endeavors to address the following research questions:

RQ 1: How do secondary school EFL teachers in Kazakhstan perceive the notions of "media," "literacy," and "media literacy" as well as the integration of media literacy into education?

RQ 2: What obstacles and challenges, in the EFL teachers' opinion, exist in the implementation of media literacy within their educational contexts?

## **Method**

### **Research design**

This research employs a qualitative research method, primarily utilizing in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 15 EFL teachers in secondary schools in Kazakhstan. Qualitative research is characterized by its focus on exploring the depth and richness of human experiences, attitudes, and perceptions, rendering it particularly well-suited for comprehending intricate phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2017), such as teachers' perceptions of media literacy. The interviews are designed based on the conceptual framework of media literacy applicable to the education field, drawing insights from scholars such as Stein and Prewett (2009), Ngomba-Westbrook (2013), and Schmidt (2013). The research questions inform the development of interview questions, covering areas such as teachers' perceptions of key terms, existing challenges in implementing media literacy, and feedback on the overall educational landscape.

To gain comprehensive insights into teachers' perspectives and challenges regarding the integration of media literacy into classroom practices, the interview instruments were strategically designed to delve into three overarching domains. These encompassed: (1) teachers' interpretations of fundamental terms; (2) identification of existing needs and obstacles pertaining to the implementation of media literacy education; and (3) soliciting constructive feedback. Qualitative data obtained from these interviews underwent rigorous analysis employing thematic analysis and deductive coding methodologies (Pope et al., 2000).

Thematic analysis and deductive coding are employed to qualitatively analyze the data gathered from the interviews, ensuring a systematic and comprehensive exploration of the teachers' perspectives. Thematic analysis, as a methodological approach, facilitates the exploration, assessment, and portrayal of recurring themes inherent within the dataset (Vaismoradi et al., 2013), involving a meticulous interpretation of the collected information. Additionally, a verification process involving cross-referencing with interview participants was conducted, thereby enhancing the reliability of the research outcomes (Rapley, 2018). Overall, the qualitative approach employed in this study facilitates a nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding media literacy education within the context of Kazakhstan's secondary schools.

The process of selecting research participants adhered to principles of voluntary participation. Employing a convenience sampling approach at the school level, schools were chosen based on factors such as time constraints, logistical manageability, and the willingness of schools to engage in the study (Flick, 2011). All participants were teachers from secondary schools located within the southern region of Kazakhstan. This geographical area was chosen due to its socioeconomic diversity and the presence of urban, suburban, and rural educational institutions. Throughout the study, strict adherence to ethical guidelines for educational researchers, both in Kazakhstan and globally, was ensured, with comprehensive considerations for the well-being of the participants (Rakisheva et al., 2021). All research activities were conducted on a voluntary basis, with explicit written consent obtained from each participant. Coding techniques were employed to safeguard the anonymity of participants, ensuring that no personal information or identifying details were disclosed.

### **Limitations**

While this study provides valuable insights into the perceptions and challenges of media literacy education among the EFL teachers in secondary schools in Kazakhstan, it is crucial to acknowledge its limitations, such as sample size and scope, sampling bias, limited methodological approach, and language and cultural factors. First, the study utilized a relatively small sample size of EFL teachers from secondary schools within a specific region of Kazakhstan. Consequently, the findings may not be broadly applicable to all EFL teachers nationwide. Furthermore, by concentrating solely on secondary schools, the study may have overlooked the perspectives and

experiences of teachers in pre-school educational contexts. Second, the utilization of a convenience sampling approach to select participants may have introduced bias into the sample. For example, teachers who volunteered to participate may hold different perspectives on media literacy compared to those who declined to participate. Additionally, the study's focus on the southern region of Kazakhstan may not sufficiently capture the diversity of perspectives and practices present across the entire country. Third, the research could have been strengthened by employing a broader range of qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection. For instance, conducting focus group discussions or implementing longitudinal studies could have provided greater depth and importance to the results. Fourth, the study focused on EFL teachers in Kazakhstan, which could impact the translation of media literacy practices and standards due to linguistic and cultural disparities. Consequently, the results may not directly apply to situations involving individuals from diverse cultural or linguistic backgrounds. Having said that, the explorative nature of the study is setting the tone for other border studies and providing access to practitioners' perceptions on the topic of both local and global importance.

### Interviews

The study entailed conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 15 EFL teachers in secondary schools in Kazakhstan. Data were collected between January and May, spanning the third and fourth terms of the 2022–2023 academic year. Each interview, ranging from 24 to 52+ years, lasted approximately one hour. The respondents comprised two males and 13 females, as presented in Table 1. On average, research participants possessed seven years of teaching experience, with tenure ranging from a minimum of one year to over 20 years. The majority of participants taught at the primary and middle school levels, with only four reporting their roles as high school teachers. Regarding professional development, 60% of respondents indicated attending courses or events aimed at promoting media literacy education, while 40% reported not having participated in such events or courses.

**Table 1***Research participants*

Characteristics		Number (%), n = 15
Gender	Men	2 (13.3)
	Women	13 (86.7)
Location	Urban	6 (39.9)
	Suburban	4 (26.7)
	Rural	5 (33.25)
Courses on media literacy	Attended	9 (60)
	Not attended	6 (40)
Years of teaching experience	0-5 years	3 (20)
	5-10 years	4 (26.7)
	10-15 years	3 (20)
	15-20 years	2 (13.3)
	20+ years	3 (20)

The face-to-face interviews were structured into three sections, following a brief introductory part that gathered information on demographics, teaching experience, location, and any certifications in media literacy education, as suggested by Stein and Prewett (2009). During the preliminary interview session, the study's purpose and requirements were elucidated, and the schedule was tailored to accommodate the teachers' availability. To facilitate open communication, I initiated dialogue by posing open-ended questions and allowing sufficient time for contemplation until the interviewees felt at ease sharing their insights. The interview process adhered to the four-step approach of in-depth interviewing, comprising apprehension, exploration, cooperation, and involvement, as outlined by DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006). Subsequently, based on the preliminary interviews, teachers who demonstrated active inquiry-based learning in foreign language teaching and exhibited a commitment to enhancing media literacy within their classrooms were selected as participants. These individuals were chosen due to their potential to offer valuable insights into media literacy integration, thereby furnishing rich examples for the study. The interview questions revolved around the teachers' philosophical perspectives, instructional practices, attitudes, assessment policies, and perceptions of educational policies pertaining to media literacy pedagogy.

The initial interview was conducted to assess teachers' grasp of fundamental research concepts. Participants were prompted to furnish definitions for the terms "literacy," "media," and "media literacy" (Ngomba-Westbrook, 2013, p. 81). Subsequently, the second interview aimed to examine teachers' perspectives on their students' media literacy competencies, along with an exploration of the degree to which secondary school teachers are integrating media literacy in their classrooms. In light of earlier research findings (Schmidt, 2013) revealing relatively low levels of student media literacy competencies, it is anticipated that teachers will perceive a modest level of development in this domain. Following this, inquiries delve into the frequency with which teachers integrate media literacy components into their lessons, as well as their beliefs regarding the importance of addressing media literacy in the EFL classroom. Notably, given the focal point of prior scholarly investigations and educational initiatives at the secondary school level (Schmidt, 2013), these questions are poised to offer insights into educational reforms and pedagogical strategies. The third set of inquiries aimed to assess the needs and obstacles hindering the implementation of media literacy within an educational context. This concluding segment of the interview introduces questions crafted by the researcher, inviting respondents to reflect on the challenges teachers encounter when teaching media literacy (Ngomba-Westbrook, 2013, p. 81). Additionally, inquiries are included to identify the goals teachers deem important in integrating media literacy elements into their classrooms and to elucidate their needs for further professional development. The efficacy of the third interview hinges on insights gleaned from preceding interviews (Fox, 2009), thereby informing the design of the inquiry set. For instance, teachers are prompted to expound on strategies for mitigating potential risks associated with social media usage while harnessing its benefits for students, evaluate the viability of regulatory measures such as a Code of Conduct in media, and elucidate mechanisms for aligning governmental educational standards with the promotion of media literacy. The focal point of the third interview revolves around exploring existing national educational policies aimed at enhancing teachers' media literacy at the country level.

### **Findings**

The objective of the interview was to understand teachers' perceptions of media literacy as an educational concept. Table 2 (see below) provides a comprehensive overview of the range of

responses obtained. The table is structured into three columns, each delineating distinct aspects: an identifier for the teacher, their interpretations of key media literacy terms, and their elucidations regarding the primary purpose of teaching media literacy in the classroom. Within each column, three rows are allocated, with each row corresponding to a definition of a media literacy term: “literacy,” “media,” and “media literacy.” For example, the in-service teacher analyzed as “Teacher\_” delineates “literacy” as the ability to “read, write, speak, and listen to the media critically.” The term “media” is characterized as “any channels of communication,” while “media literacy” is elucidated as the proficiency in “consuming and creating media products.” Although each teacher's response to this question was original, evidence suggests recurring themes among these focus groups, indicating a sufficiently representative sample.

Notably, all teachers provided a definition of literacy that emphasized reading and writing skills, mirroring the broader population’s perception of the term. Responses to questions centered on “media literacy,” exhibit evidence of being reasonably qualified at a satisfactory level. While most teachers demonstrated a fundamental understanding of “media literacy,” they often lacked detailed instructional strategies. For instance, Teacher\_3 and Teacher\_1’s definitions associate media literacy with both the creation and consumption of information. In contrast, Teacher\_5 and Teacher\_1 emphasized the skill of discerning facts from fiction. However, Teacher\_7 diverged from these definitions, highlighting the connection with the global context: “Communication to make a difference in the world”. Additionally, Teacher\_8 mentioned the modern term “white paper literacy” and equated it with media literacy, defining it as “the ability to analyze, understand, and write a media text.”

**Table 2***Teachers' Perceptions of Media Literacy: Key Concepts and Definitions*

<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Literacy</b>	<b>Media</b>	<b>Media Literacy</b>
Teacher_3	The capacity to critically read, write, speak, and listen to media.	Any channel of communication	The capability to both consume and create media products.
Teacher_1	The capacity for reading and writing.	Television, radio, newspapers, magazines, and the internet.	Media literacy entails the capacity to interpret information and discern between facts and opinions.
Teacher_10	Using language correctly	Using Sources of information	Media literacy education involves instructing students in applying critical thinking to media messages and empowering them to utilize media for creating their own messages.
Teacher_5	The proficiency of students in reading, writing, speaking, and listening	It is a powerful tool.	Media literacy education encompasses guiding students in applying critical thinking to media messages and empowering them to use media for crafting their own messages.
Teacher_7	Knowledge and the skill to articulate one's own thoughts	Media serve as the avenues through which information is obtained and disseminated	Communication aimed at effecting positive change in the world.
Teacher_8	The capability to write without errors	It encompasses all forms of communication transmitted electronically across the globe via computer networks and fiber optic cables	Media or white paper literacy refers to the capacity to analyze, understand, and compose media texts.



The aforementioned table indicates that the EFL teachers lacked clarity of the notions of 'media', 'literacy', and 'media literacy' and confused them very often. Concerning the teachers' classroom practices and media literacy, they articulated goals such as fostering critical thinking skills, adapting to an information-driven world, and discerning unreliable sources (see Table 3 below). However, diverging from her colleagues, one teacher identified the aim of teaching media literacy as "expanding opportunities for self-development, self-realization, and self-motivation" This response aligns with the establishment of learner autonomy as both a conceptual framework and a practical strategy for media literacy education.

**Table 3**

*Media Literacy and Teachers' Classroom Practices*

Themes	Frequency
To educate children in adapting to the information-driven world and guiding them toward productive and beneficial directions	4
To cultivate the habits of effective communication and foster active citizenship in the contemporary world.	1
I believe it depends on the theme; leveraging media tools can aid in accomplishing your primary objectives, thereby enhancing the quality of your lessons.	1
Teaching media literacy equips students with skills that primarily enable them to think critically about the media.	4
In the present day, numerous unreliable sources exist and are essential for students to be cognizant of them.	3
Expanding opportunities for self-development, self-realization, and self-motivation	2

Teachers' perceptions of media literacy varied depending on their preparation and the policy guidelines in their respective schools. They felt positive about media literacy being facilitated and supported at the country level, as evidenced by statements such as:

I know that in 2012 our country started the work on facilitating the formation of literacy in the field of media education, for journalists, teachers, and the youth. Started publishing work

experiences of international researchers in different counties, organized seminars and workshops, and considered issues of media education in social networks such as conferences (Teacher\_12).

The educational system in Kazakhstan is highly centralized, whereby the National Academy of Education, named after Ybyrai Altynsarin (hereinafter NAE), is responsible for designing and implementing key policies that provide instructional methodologic letters traditionally every year to all ranges from pre-school, school, and college (vocational education) levels (NAE, 2021). The NAE is the primary institution responsible for developing and implementing educational policies in Kazakhstan, overseeing curriculum design, and providing methodological guidance to educators at all levels. In the 2021-2022 academic year, students could choose the Global Competencies course or take other elective courses aimed at helping students develop 21st century skills. Media literacy was suggested to be studied as a variable for 8th grade learners. This year suggested the official introduction of the media literacy course into the secondary education curriculum and stated the following definition: ‘The Media Literacy course teaches students to work with information, evaluate and analyze materials, and distinguish between false information and propaganda’ (NAE, 2021, p. 10). This definition of media literacy represents the condensed form of media literacy competencies: ‘to work with information’ addresses issues of access, while ‘distinguish between false information and propaganda’ suggests access to a more critical perspective on media and signals concerns about the harmful effects of fabricated and manipulated information on democratic societies (McKay & Tenove, 2020; Konieczny, 2023). Teachers also mentioned events related to media literacy development, as exemplified by the following:

I prepared a lesson on developing students’ media literacy in EFL classrooms [...] by using news from the BBC, Voice of America, and Tengrinews about current events (Teacher\_8).

However, teachers criticized the lack of practice and post-course support, with one stating:

However, students learn how to think critically about media through practice. We do not have much practice in media literacy (Teacher\_12).

Another participant also mentioned the lack of professional development opportunities, expressing: "One time in a three-year course is not enough for us; as technology and media are developing every day, we need more advice." (Teacher\_11).

Professional development opportunities and support from school administrations are essential to addressing this challenge (McNelly & Harvey, 2021). Professional development and leadership support are important factors in moderating teachers' challenges and increasing their ability to integrate media literacy into classrooms (Zhang et al., 2014). This study indicates the lack of teacher training in media literacy education at all levels. Therefore, professional development should address veteran teachers' media literacy, who may require more hands-on support in integrating new methods into their classroom practice (Gretter & Yadav, 2018).

The responses to the question about pedagogical and learning barriers to teaching media literacy in secondary schools are documented in Table 4 below. Overall, teachers highlighted concerns such as students being overburdened, the lack of knowledge on how to teach media literacy effectively, insufficient technological resources, and the absence of teaching models and media literacy disciplines in the curriculum. Additionally, some teachers admitted the lack of understanding regarding potential challenges, opting to respond with "I do not know."

**Table 4.**

*Obstacles and Challenges in Integrating Media Literacy into Educational Context*

Themes	Frequency
I do not know	14,3%
Students at schools are burdened with additional subjects	7.1%
Lack of media literacy lessons in schools	21.3%
Insufficient technology skills or support; absence of role models	28.4%
Lack of media tools and educational programs	14,3%
Limited access to devices, low income, weak internet connectivity in rural areas, and absence of whiteboards	14,3%
Lack of comprehension regarding the importance of the topic	7.1%

Outdated beliefs among teachers and traditional societal values, such as placing trust solely in television information, impede the advancement of media literacy. One teacher remarked:

This is a kind of Soviet Era heritage; when there was censorship for all types of publications, people believed what they read in the newspapers and national TV channels, and they do not understand the change in mass media nowadays. Parents and administration do not want to change and accept new education trends (Teacher\_14).

Interestingly, some teachers attributed governmental policies as potential obstacles deliberately hindering the development of media literacy. One teacher expressed:

I guess our government hinders the development of media literacy and allocates fewer funds or no funding at all. Poor internet connection and very little high-quality and up-to-date information in the Kazakh language are evidence of this (Teacher\_5).

The lack of financial support and modern devices in schools was emphasized by other teachers:

There are always problems with devices in the classrooms; smartboards do not work; there is no internet connection. Therefore, I must bring my notebook with me to every lesson to show presentations, tasks, or videos (Teacher\_9).

Additionally, some teachers admitted to resorting to their own devices whenever they wanted to incorporate media into their lessons: "I have to bring my notebook and cables for using websites' resources in the classroom. Only several classrooms have smart boards or projectors in our school" (Teacher\_15).

There were also thematic discussions concerning the ethical considerations of pedagogy in our multimedia world, particularly in light of the rapid development of social media. This is exemplified by Teacher\_1's remarks:

I was tasked by the administration to create a video lesson, which was intended to be uploaded to the YouTube channel of the regional methodology department. It was a very laborious process; we had to shoot multiple scenes during our lesson, which left the children dissatisfied. Personally, I am hesitant to appear in front of an audience and my students. You see, teenagers are often reluctant to show their faces on camera, which results in their diminished participation. However, it was an urgent and stringent directive from the administration.

In general, none of the teachers mentioned the process of obtaining written and informed consent from parents before capturing images or creating videos. Instead, they emphasized the importance of finding original activities for demonstrative lessons to introduce new teaching and learning methods.

It appears that social media platforms in Kazakhstan are inundated with publicly accessible pictures and videos of schoolchildren. The majority of respondents evaluated their student'' media literacy level as average and expressed a desire to enhance it during English lessons. Nearly half of the teachers reported devoting an average amount of time during English lessons to address media literacy competencies, while 20% acknowledged addressing this issue hardly ever. Moreover, 26.7% of teachers stated that they spend slightly more time addressing media literacy competencies in EFL classrooms. Only one teacher out of 15 reported consistently trying to develop student'' media literacy competencies. However, most teachers recognized the importance of addressing media literacy within the educational system; 66.6% consider teaching media literacy as important, with few perceiving it as of average importance. None of the respondents indicated that they believed it to be unimportant.

### **Discussion**

The aim of this research was to investigate the perceptions of EFL teachers in secondary schools in Kazakhstan regarding media literacy in education, as well as to identify potential challenges in implementing media literacy. By conducting a thorough exploration of teachers' perspectives and experiences, the study sought to uncover current issues and propose avenues for further research to improve media literacy education.

First, the study found that the EFL teachers' perceptions of media literacy are influenced by four key factors: professional development opportunities, availability of classroom resources and materials, administrative support, and the broader educational context (Pederson, 2023; Yavuz-Konokman, 2020). Moreover, teachers in our study demonstrate awareness of different types of media, particularly associating them with digital resources. The study observed that while teachers generally recognize the diverse forms of media, there is a need for a deeper understanding of media literacy terminology and concepts among them. In addressing the initial set of questions regarding the conceptualization of key media literacy terminology, this study revealed that terms such as "media," "literacy," and "media literacy" are not universally understood by EFL teachers. Instead, their meanings varied widely and were influenced by the teachers' experiences and access to professional development programs.

Teachers' perceptions about media literacy play a crucial role in implementing media literacy policies, guidelines, and standards in schools, as they are central to media education (Zhang et al., 2020; Sauerteig et al., 2019). As it is often implemented through teacher initiatives (Palsa & Salomaa, 2020). Successful implementation relies on high-standard teacher training, including theoretical and practical skills, knowledge of young people's media uses, and institutional actions (Lähdesmäki & Maunula, 2023). However, critics argue that teachers in many countries lack proper pre-service and in-service training for effective media education practices (Arcus, 2014; Yeh & Wan, 2019). Teachers' agency significantly influences media education in schools and its scope (Aguaded & Delgado-Ponce, 2019). While traditional literacy and numeracy are prioritized, media literacy has a lesser place in school education (Altamura et al., 2023; Berger, 2023). The concept of media literacy encompasses various aspects, including the skills needed in its domain. Therefore, there is still a need to enhance efforts aimed at fostering a broader understanding of media literacy in education.

Second, the study revealed that the majority of EFL teachers are eager to address media literacy and would like to enhance it in their classrooms. The findings support the idea that the digital nativity of Net Generation students is only partially correlated with the most prevalent media-related competencies (Kennedy et al., 2008; Hibbard, 2011). Nonetheless, there were variations in the extent to which media literacy was incorporated; some teachers proactively integrated media literacy concepts into their teaching practice. Interestingly, the data indicate that not all teachers equally emphasize media literacy. Specifically, media literacy is more likely to be addressed at the high school level and less frequently taught in primary grades. Despite the rarity of mandatory courses in media literacy within secondary education (Hobbs & Jensen, 2009; Bulger & Davison, 2018), teachers demonstrate a strong inclination to incorporate media literacy concepts into their lessons.

Digital media has enabled numerous opportunities for participation and content creation, allowing individuals to minimize risks and maximize its benefits (Valtonen et al., 2019). Media education aims to empower students to make informed decisions about their media use, rather than imposing predetermined positions (Tondeur et al., 2019). Thereby, emphasis in the classroom has shifted from protectionism to preparation, enabling students to develop their own conclusions and develop

diversity in education (Naiditch, 2013). As a result, media literacy is key to equipping students with the skills, knowledge, and resources to make informed decisions about their media use (Pereira & Toscano, 2021).

Third, the research unveiled important obstacles in implementing media literacy into the EFL teachers' educational contexts. These challenges encompass the lack of national policies and guidelines on media literacy and its ethics; the lack of clarity regarding how to integrate media literacy competencies into classroom; disparities in the support and resources provided to teachers based on their school location; the lack of professional development opportunities that would promote media literacy implementation into classroom; and divergent perceptions and practices of media literacy education across different schools and student demographics. As a result, the study underscored the importance of professional development opportunities for teachers, access to classroom resources, administrative support, and the broader educational context in shaping teachers' attitudes and practices concerning media literacy education. The approach to addressing media literacy competencies remains ambiguous (Schmidt, 2013), thus underscoring the need for further exploration of teaching strategies. Furthermore, the findings indicate that media literacy is seldom integrated into primary grade education, emphasizing the importance of incorporating media literacy coursework into mandatory education at the primary and middle school levels (Martens, 2010; Flores-Koulish, 2020).

Despite the majority of the EFL teachers in secondary schools view media literacy education as important, the study reported the discrepancy among teachers based on their school type and location. This study corroborates previous research, suggesting that support for media literacy education may be less pronounced in suburban and rural schools (Alimbayeva et al., 2021; Scheibe, 2009). Through exploring teachers' perceptions of media literacy development in EFL classrooms in Kazakhstan, this study has underscored the importance of media literacy development as a vital factor in attaining high language proficiency and resilience against cyber threats. On rare occasions, participants voiced opposing viewpoints regarding the importance of media literacy ( $f = 2$ ). For instance, Participant Teacher\_2 stated, "Firstly, the importance of media literacy should be explained to the teachers, as I have no idea of it." This challenges the hypothesis of widespread support for media literacy education among school teachers. Despite the

educational policy emphasizing the internalization of education and a concerted effort to enhance the curriculum, these educators appeared to value media literacy less than their counterparts at the high school level. Additionally, factors such as the type of school and the proficiency level of students' language skills importantly influenced teachers' perceptions and implementation of media education. Teachers in specialized schools and gymnasiums exhibited greater interest in incorporating media literacy development tasks with students compared to those in mainstream public schools.

In general, the findings indicate that the EFL teachers possess a basic understanding of media literacy and are enthusiastic about fostering students' media literacy skills within their classrooms. Wilson et al. (2011) highlight the importance of cultivating a conducive environment for media literacy among teachers, as this enables them to fulfill their professional obligations more effectively by delivering high-quality education to their students. Furthermore, there is a pressing need for additional professional development courses and teaching resources tailored to bolstering media literacy within the Kazakhstani educational system. Such initiatives would promote enhanced transparency, accountability, and dialogue among key stakeholders in education. It is essential to recognize that if teachers lack proficiency in media literacy, it becomes challenging to expect students to acquire such competencies.

### **Conclusion**

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on the development of media literacy in EFL classrooms in Kazakhstan. The research findings fill a current gap in studies in such fields as media literacy, teacher education and achieving SDG 2030 goals. The data indicate that media has become an integral part of school education in Kazakhstan, serving as both a teaching aid and a tool. There is substantial support for media literacy among high school EFL teachers, and it is evident that teachers need clear-cut policies and training to facilitate media literacy in their classrooms. Moreover, teachers in suburban and rural areas tend to address media literacy competencies less frequently compared to their counterparts in urban and specialized schools. Therefore, it is crucial to narrow this gap by expanding the availability of teacher training programs and ensuring that schools have access to modern technological resources. Although this research exclusively focused on the EFL teachers in secondary schools in Kazakhstan, the study drew



reasonable conclusions regarding the challenges and perceptions of media literacy within a specific context. While this approach offered certain advantages, it also meant that educators from other geographic regions and those teaching at different educational levels were not represented. Given the potential variations in educational standards and student learning outcomes across disciplines and institutions, the perspectives of educators may differ at other levels of education. Therefore, future research could explore the viewpoints of educators at kindergarten, tertiary, and higher education levels to provide a more comprehensive understanding of media literacy development across diverse educational contexts in Kazakhstan.

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