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MEDIA LITERACY SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN EFL CLASSROOMS

The article touches upon the issue of media literacy skills development in the context of education and society digitalization. The author describes the reasons and the ways media literacy skills may be incorporated into teaching practice at different

levels. The author also draws the reader's attention to the main activities which contribute to acquiring media literacy skills.

Key words: media education; media literacy; information literacy; media sources; language skills.

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РАЗВИТИЕ НАВЫКОВ МЕДИАГРАМОТНОСТИ В ПРОЦЕССЕ ОБУЧЕНИЯ АНГЛИЙСКОМУ ЯЗЫКУ

Данная статья посвящена вопросам развития медийной и информационной грамотности в условиях информатизации образования и общества в целом. Автор описывает способы внедрения элементов медийной и информационной культуры в процессе обучения английскому языку на различных уровнях; приводит примеры конкретных упражнений, направленных на развитие соответствующих навыков, дает рекомендации по их использованию.

Ключевые слова: медиаобразование; медийная грамотность; информационная грамотность; медиаисточники; языковые навыки.

Introduction. Nowadays teenagers are exposed to a large quantity of media every day: TV, radio, magazines, text messages, memes, social media, computer games, advertising, etc. but the problem is their inability to understand and evaluate various types of media and their implicit and explicit meanings (media literacy skills). These skills are essential in the digital age. Different types of media influence our choices (products, education, careers) and as a result influence our lives. Teaching teenagers to be sensible media consumers will help them to think critically and make decisions having all kind of alternatives in mind. Unfortunately, students are not taught media literacy skills at schools and universities; this topic is not included in the curriculum in Belarus. What is more, there are not enough resources and courses on the topic available in the Russian language.

Main part. One of the ways to solve this problem is incorporating the elements of media literacy while teaching English. Many EFL teachers rely on media sources (newspapers, magazines, advertisements, Internet sites, film and TV) as up-to-date sources of authentic communication. Bringing media sources such as web-

articles, newspaper articles, TV commercials and other authentic materials into the classroom can be used to develop the language skills. Adding this type of content can also become a motivational push to engage students into active learning. Thus, using media messages while teaching the language may develop students' language skills as well as develop their media literacy skills.

According to the National Association for Media Literacy Education "Media literacy is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication" [1]. Media literacy builds upon traditional literacy and offers new forms of reading and writing. It empowers people to be critical thinkers and makers, effective communicators, and active citizens.

There are several reasons for educators to include this topic in teaching and learning goals:

- teaches to think critically;
- cultivates other 21st century skills;
- helps to become a smart media consumer;
- helps to become a responsible media creator and distributor;
- enhances personal development;
- increases students' motivation and engagement level;
- helps students understand how media constructs reality;
- exposes students to real-life English.

Most educators usually teach with and through media but not about media. Educators bring media into the classroom, their students do research online, create presentations, read the articles or listen to podcasts but still educators do not see these materials as a way to develop other skills, i.e. media literacy skills. It is quite common because we think of literacy in the language learning context (reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills) and do not pay much attention to media literacy as we do not see it as something equally important. But if we look at the literacy from the perspective of our students, the connection between language learning and media literacy becomes clearer. A successful language learner is not defined only by his linguistic knowledge but also by his ability to understand messages about social interaction, rules of behaviour and other meanings media messages may convey.

There are a number of ways to incorporate elements of media literacy into language teaching. In the next few paragraphs we are going to look closer at them.

1. *Equip students with strategies to evaluate media.* The students we are teaching at the moment belong to Generation Z (true digital natives) and generation Alpha (they have a unique digital savviness). But just because they spend lots of time interacting with media does not mean they are aware of how media works or how it influences them. Students must be exposed to the strategies which will help them evaluate media.

One of the strategies which can be used is an E.S.C.A.P.E. strategy (Figure 1). This acronym helps students remember six key concepts for evaluating information: evidence, source, context, audience purpose, execution [2]. Students may test this strategy to debunk fake news or any other piece of news they come across. What is more, this strategy may be used at different levels and be a part of any topic an educator is teaching at the moment: e.g. while teaching about the world or nature, you can ask your student to evaluate the information about the Pacific Northwest tree octopus which is actually a piece of fake news.

2. *Help students explore resources.* Teaching students to find credible resources is not an easy task, but still there are appropriate strategies for students of all ages to help them learn the basics.

Elementary students should be taught

- the basics of keyword searching to help them find the best sources as they start using the Internet for finding information;
- the rules of examining photos which can be clues to the reliability of a website or an article;

the questions to evaluate age-appropriate websites: the more time students spend on high-quality websites, the more easily they will be able to identify other quality websites themselves.



Figure 1 — E.S.C.A.P.E. strategy

Teenagers may discuss media bias and how the person who stands behind a media message influence its tone and meaning. Teachers together with students explore popular news sites and try to identify potential media bias. They can also come up with the negative effects of this and look for similar stories on the same topic on two different sites. In order to develop writing skills, students read a piece of information and are asked to create the narration presenting the opposite point of view. Thus, writing and critical thinking skills are developed at the same time.

While going through all these steps, students can create a list of credible sources and share it with peers to use in the future. Of course, this list should be questioned from time to time both by educators and by peers as sometimes the credibility level may decrease.

The most important piece of advice students should be given is the following: students should check multiple sources before drawing conclusions. Information coming from multiple sources is usually more reliable than something said or written by one source. You can prove the importance of it by giving the example about scientists: data is stronger if multiple researchers conducting the same experiment have the same findings.

3. *Show students how media influences our behavior.* The best way to understand the influence of media is to talk about media messages. Media messages may have both positive and negative influence on students' minds. Media may spread moral values and social norms which positively influence the community members. Negative effects include negative portrayal of certain groups, promoting illegal activities and others.

Ask your students to analyze the content they consume. For example, watch a commercial advertising an energy drink and ask students to answer the questions afterwards. *What are the main features of the commercial? What is its mood? How do the people feel? What does the commercial make you do? Does it mean that buying this energy drink will change your life for the better?* These questions will help students understand what meaning a media message conveys. This type of activity can also lead to critical analysis of all the advertisements they come across in their daily life.

One more example of an activity that will help reflect on the impact the media have is "*Breakfast with the Hero*" activity. The teacher asks students to name the person they would like to spend

10—15 minutes at breakfast. There are no limits: they can choose any person (real / historical / imaginary / a person from the past or future). The students write the name on a piece of paper and put them into the box. Almost all the names are usually the names of people students learned about from different types of media. Thus, students understand that media sources play a great role in their lives. Moreover, while taking part in this activity, students discuss the names in the box and try to identify who has written this or that name. Thus, they can improve their critical thinking skills as well as their language skills.

4. *Ask students to create media.* Educators should teach students to be responsible media creators. It does not mean that they will do it professionally in the future. They have already become media creators because they design and distribute information, at least on their social networks. Students should understand that they affect multiple people when they post updates or photos on Instagram. They should double-check what footprint they leave and whether their content is an example of visual material of value or visual junk.

For learning purposes, educators may ask students to create study content: for example, write a timeline of a series of events or design a mind map. The students will benefit twice: they have an opportunity to revise the material they have learned as well as practice their creative skills. Below you can find an example of a media product created by teenagers on the topic of effective communication (Figure 2).



Figure 2 — Effective Communication Leaflet

The tool your students may use to create the media is Canva. Canva is a free-to-use online graphical tool that combines design, photo editing, and layout to help teachers and students create their projects. Canva is great because it already has lots of templates such as leaflets, social media posts, comic strips, brochures, posters, and infographics. Students have a chance to work together and be assigned into teams. The products can be downloaded in different formats as well as shared with others.

More hands-on activities to use with the students of different levels as well as useful resources may be found through the QR-code provided below (Figure 3).



Figure 3 — QR code
“Activities and Useful
Resources”

Today it has become a common practice for teachers to use media resources to provide language input. Developing students’ media literacy through integrating these resources into the language classroom is a challenging and demanding task for language teachers due to a number of reasons. Educators must possess interdisciplinary knowledge and keep up with students and their interests. Both sides of the classroom should understand that media literacy is essential for successful cross-cultural communication. In addition, there is a gap between traditional teaching and communicative teaching in the digital world. Educators need to plan ahead what kind of meaningful and relevant activities they are going to include into a lesson plan so that it is well-balanced. They should be aware that students may face difficulties as their vocabulary, reading, writing, or communication skills may be different. Having some kind of scaffolding in this situation may support students and make their journey towards acquiring media literacy skills easier. Among other factors educators should consider while selecting the media sources and assignments for students are the following: age, maturity, appropriateness and relevance.

Conclusion. Media consumption is a part of students’ daily lives. Therefore, educators have to deal with it. Thus, using media in teaching a language should be expanded to teaching about media, not limited to teaching through and with media. Having media literacy skills gives students an opportunity to take control of what kind of information they get and become intelligent consumers of media.

Being exposed to various media sources brings people together and makes language development possible in the ways not thought of even a few years ago. It includes language learning, socialising, entertaining, research. Language learners are involved in a meaningful way when they understand how communication works in a foreign language, rather than only performing it. With incorporating of media literacy into English as a foreign language classroom, students develop language skills and acquire diverse strategies which help them discuss messages from different media outlets, express their personal opinions, and gather additional information to support their findings using the English language. The points mentioned above contribute to developing an active citizen who is interested, willing and able to access information, evaluate it, and make decisions in order to participate in civic and cultural life.

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DEFINITION AND STRUCTURE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS' METHODOLOGICAL LITERACY

The article deals with the study of methodological literacy of a foreign language teacher, as well as its structure. The structure of the content and educational components of literacy is considered. Various approaches to the definition of the concept of methodological literacy are discussed. This study touches upon the criteria for assessing the methodological literacy of future foreign language teachers.