# *Media literacy instruction in today's classrooms: A study of teachers' knowledge, confidence, and integration*

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## ABSTRACT

Teachers play a critical role in helping to ensure that students leave school with the skills needed to not only be critical consumers of media, but to also be thoughtful and knowledgeable producers of mediated messages. Despite the important role of teachers in media literacy education, we still know very little about teachers' knowledge of and experiences with media literacy in the classroom. This information is a critical piece in understanding how to best support teachers as they integrate media literacy education within PreK-12 classrooms. The current study seeks to add to the growing body of research in this area by examining secondary teachers' knowledge of media literacy, confidence incorporating it in classes, and actual integration of media literacy education in courses. Results of a survey of 71 teachers found a relationship between knowledge, confidence, and integration of media literacy. Implications of the study results are discussed.

**Keywords:** *media literacy, secondary teachers, conceptualization, self-efficacy, integration.*

# INTRODUCTION

We are living in a world with the largest media landscape in history. Today, anyone with an internet connection can produce mediated messages, empower people to create social change, and spread misinformation and disinformation. In order to navigate this ever-changing media environment, users need to be media literate. This is especially true for those within our school-age population who spend much of their time in front of screens (Rideout & Robb, 2019).

Media use can certainly build knowledge about media; however, research suggests that young people have difficulty evaluating media content (e.g., Steeves, 2014; Wineburg et al., 2016). Specifically, students report that they are taught basic digital literacy competence in school, such as how to conduct an online search and verify information, but research has shown that they have limited knowledge about the commercial aspects of the online sites and platforms (Steeves, 2014), cannot effectively reason about the information found on the internet (McGrew et al., 2017), and have difficulty analyzing various types of media messages (Wineburg et al., 2016). Media literacy education can facilitate in building these skills.

Media literacy education (MLE) has been conceptualized by the National Association for Media Literacy Education as the "active inquiry and critical thinking about the messages we receive and create so as to develop informed, reflective, and engaged participants essential to a democratic society" (Culver & Redmond, 2019, p. 2). MLE can help children and adolescents better understand and analyze media for accuracy and bias (Kahne & Bowyer, 2017) and increase knowledge and awareness of media's influence (Jeong et al., 2012; Martens, 2010). It has also been shown to change attitudes (Rozendaal et al., 2012; Scharrer, 2006), empower youth (Evans, 2019), mitigate the impact of harmful media messages (Jeong et al., 2012), and foster adolescents' civic engagement (Martens & Hobbs, 2013). Despite the numerous benefits of MLE, currently only 14 states in the United States are in the process of "establishing media literacy curriculum as a priority in K-12 schools" (Media Literacy Now, 2020, p. 16).

While this is an exciting time for MLE, empirically we know very little about the experiences of those charged with incorporating media literacy into their curriculum (i.e., primary and secondary educators). Currently, there is a small, but growing, body of research that explores teachers' perspectives on MLE (e.g., Badia et al., 2015; Belova & Eilks, 2016) and how they integrate media literacy into their classroom instruction (e.g., Culver & Redmond, 2019). The current study contributes to this growing body of knowledge by exploring teachers' understanding of media literacy, their level of confidence integrating it into their classes, and the ways in which they integrate MLE into their instruction.

## Literature review

To effectively teach students about media literacy, teachers need to have a solid understanding of MLE. According to the National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE), "in its simplest terms, media literacy builds upon the foundation of traditional literacy and offers new forms of reading and writing. Media literacy empowers people to be critical thinkers and makers, effective communicators and active citizens" (National Association for Media Literacy Education, n.d.). The critical thinking piece of this definition is what Weninger et al., (2017) refer to as a "traditional understanding of MLE." (p. 433). This traditional conceptualization of media literacy focuses on critical analyses of texts and media effects. However, Mihailidis (2014) suggests that "media literacy education is about more than simply the interpretation and analysis of messages. It must also incorporate the larger environments and landscapes that are part of digital culture" (p. 34). An extended understanding of MLE includes media production, reflective communicative practices, and promoting social and global engagement (Weninger et al., 2017).

Simons et al., (2017) created a framework for personal and pedagogical-didactic competencies that include components of this extended definition of MLE. They found that these competencies were clustered around the three different themes of using media, understanding media, and contributing medially. Using media refers to the "technical-instrumental use of media," (p. 107) while understanding media relates to a critical understanding of media and mediated messages, as well as building analytical skills. Contributing medially focuses on creating media and participating in mediated environments. These three themes, which make up the framework for the current study, center on teacher competencies and incorporate components of both the traditional and extended understanding of MLE (Simons et al., 2017).

In order to encourage students' critical thinking about media, build students' skills with technology, and

empower youth to participate in society, educators first need to be informed and educated about MLE. According to research, the success or failure of media literacy initiatives in schools rely on the knowledge, beliefs, and actions of the teachers (Simmons et al., 2017).

Scholars have argued it is critical that we measure these factors to determine if our media literacy initiatives are successful in the educational setting. Much of the empirical work in the field of media literacy has provided valuable insight about the effectiveness of media literacy activities in a classroom (e.g., Jeong et al., 2012; Kahne & Bowyer, 2017) and students' understanding of media literacy (e.g., Arke & Primack, 2009; Chang et al., 2011; Hobbs & Frost, 2003; Pinto, 2010; Schilder & Redmond, 2019). However, instruments that measure teachers' media literacy competencies are limited. Several recently developed instruments measure teachers' understanding of MLE, media habits, personal and pedagogical-didactical competencies in the field of media literacy, and instructional strategies for media use within the classroom (e.g., Simmons et al., 2017; Weninger et al., 2017). These studies provide a strong foundation for the development of subsequent research that explores teachers' experiences with media literacy in the classroom.

Though the research on teachers' conceptualization of media literacy is scarce, current literature suggests that teachers fall on a continuum of understanding and that teachers' understanding of media literacy can be impacted by other variables such as content or subject area (Deal et al., 2010), training (Scull & Kupersmidt, 2011) and beliefs (Eteokleous, 2008; Goktas et al., 2013). For example, Hattani (2019) asked Moroccan secondary teachers about their understanding of the term MLE and found varied levels of understanding ranging from an in-depth understanding to a more limited view. Specifically, 35% of the teachers reported having no understanding of the concept. Researchers have also found that some teachers think media literacy is simply the use of media and technology, while others who have a more complex understanding of media literacy are able to effectively integrate media literacy within the curriculum of their classroom (Deal et al., 2010). Furthermore, when teachers do report a strong understanding of media literacy, it tends to be the a more traditional conceptualization of media literacy (i.e., media literacy education is about the critical evaluation of media messages) and less of an understanding of the expanded definition of media literacy (i.e., media

literacy education teaches students to be producers of media and appreciate the aesthetic design of media) (Weninger et al., 2017).

Although understanding of media literacy across teachers varies, with a good number of teachers reporting little understanding of media literacy, media literacy teacher training has been shown to strengthen teachers' beliefs in media literacy as well as their familiarity with media literacy education (Scull & Kupersmidt, 2011). Indeed, this research purports a range of understanding of media literacy reported by teachers, from very limited to more complex; however, teachers' understanding lacks what some scholars refer to as extended understanding of media literacy. Media literacy here moves beyond just the critical analysis of text. Knowledge in this area includes an understanding that media literacy involves students as media producers who use media to engage a broader audience (Weninger et al., 2017).

Along with teachers' knowledge or understanding of media literacy, their confidence integrating technology or media literacy in the classroom is related to their integration of media literacy in courses. For example, research has indicated a relationship between teachers' beliefs about their competence and use of digital technology within the classroom (e.g., Eteokleous, 2008; Goktas et al., 2013) and finds that teachers with higher self-efficacy are more apt to use technology and are more comfortable using technology in the classroom (Holden & Rada, 2011; Vannatta & Fordham, 2010). A study by Petko (2012) that examined the frequency and diversity of computer use of 357 Swiss secondary teachers found that teachers used computers and the internet more often when they felt competent in their use of the technology and were confident that technology will impact student learning. Furthermore, research has indicated that teachers who have confidence in their own digital skills (operational and social media skills) and who feel that information and computer technology (ICT) can have an impact on learning, utilize more digital technology activities with students (Wastiau et al., 2013). Despite the important role that confidence might play in integrating technology and media literacy in the classroom, research does suggest that many teachers lack confidence in their ability to analyze media, as well as teach about media in the classroom (Stein & Prewett, 2009).

Along with knowledge of media literacy and confidence integrating media literacy in the classroom, studies suggest that other variables may also influence the integration of media literacy in the classroom.

Factors such as a lack of teacher training in media literacy (Belova & Eilks, 2016; Deal et al., 2010), grade level taught, age of the teacher, and years spent teaching (Schmidt, 2013) may influence teachers' integration of media literacy education in the classroom.

Although the prior research gives us a glimpse into teachers' understanding of media literacy as well as their confidence in integrating and actual integration of MLE within their classroom, more research is needed. According to Hobbs (2010), "much work is needed to make digital and media literacy a fundamental part of K-12, higher education and life-long learning, in and out of school" (p. 24). Building upon the prior research, the current study seeks to further explore this connection between teachers' knowledge of, and confidence in, incorporating media literacy education into their curriculum and the actual integration of MLE in their classroom instruction. Subsequently, the following research questions were the basis for this study:

1. How do teachers conceptualize media literacy?

2. How confident are teachers in incorporating media literacy education in their classes?

3. To what extent do teachers integrate media literacy into their classes?

4. Is there a relationship between demographic variables, media literacy knowledge, teacher confidence integrating media literacy, and the integration of media literacy in courses?

## METHODS

In an effort to explore educators' understanding of, and experience with, MLE, interviews were conducted with eighteen elementary and middle school teachers, librarians, and reading specialists from a public school in Western Pennsylvania (Harvey & Golobish, 2017). The qualitative data gathered during these interviews informed the direction of the current study and the construction of this study's survey.

The goals of the current study were to investigate secondary educators' (i.e., grades 7-12) conceptualization of media literacy, confidence incorporating media literacy education within instruction, and implementation of media literacy education in the classroom. Furthermore, this study examined whether particular demographic variables (e.g., age of teachers, years spent teaching, gender) and other variables of interest (e.g., teachers' media literacy education) were related to teachers' thoughts and behaviors surrounding media literacy education. English language arts and social studies teachers, along with

library/media specialists were recruited for the study, due to the increased likelihood that teachers in these content areas would incorporate media literacy education into their classes, particularly because the Common Core Anchor Standards support skills such as critical evaluation of texts and media (National Governor's Association for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

Following approval from the college's Institutional Review Board, the researchers presented this study at a curriculum council meeting attended by school district superintendents, assistant superintendents, and administrators across 15 school districts in Western Pennsylvania. Additionally, the researchers emailed administrators not in attendance at the meeting to ask for permission for that district's schools to participate in the study. Once school district permission was secured, the researchers worked with that district's principals to disseminate the study information and survey link via email to appropriate educators. To increase participation in the study, survey participants' names were entered into a drawing to win one of four $25 gift cards to Amazon.

### Sample

A total of 71 educators completed the survey. Seventy percent of the survey participants were female (n = 50) and 100% were Caucasian. Respondents' education level varied, with almost half reporting that they held a master's degree (n = 34), followed by 23% who earned a Bachelors +24 (n = 16), 21% who earned a Masters + (n = 15), seven percent who held a Bachelor's degree (n = 5), and one percent reportedly earning a doctorate degree (n = 1).

On average, survey participants reported teaching in a full-time contract position 15.8 years. In terms of content area, half of the respondents reported teaching English language arts (n = 36), one-third taught Social Studies (n = 22), nine respondents were Library/Media Specialists, and four did not provide a response. Response options for the variable of grade level taught asked survey participants to check all grade levels that apply, therefore, the cumulative percentage for this variable does not equal 100. The highest percentage of survey respondents reported teaching 11th grade (48%, n = 34), followed by 12th grade (42%, n = 30), 10th grade (41%, n = 29), 9th grade (39%, n = 28), 7th grade (31%, n = 22), and 8th grade (27%, n = 19). Approximately half (n = 36) of the respondents reported that 25% or less of their students were labeled

economically disadvantaged in the school district, and 29 respondents reported that 26-55% of their students were labeled economically disadvantaged in their school district. Thirty-nine survey respondents (54%) reported that they had taken a course or workshop that had incorporated some component of media literacy. Within that group, 32% (n = 23) reported that they had taken one course or workshop, 14% (n = 10) had taken two courses or workshops, and 17% (n = 23) reported taking more than three workshops or courses that incorporated media literacy. Forty-nine (69%) respondents reported that they had not spent time on their own researching media literacy education.

**Measures**

Along with the demographic survey items, this study's survey included the following three media literacy scales.

*Media literacy knowledge*. In order to assess survey respondents' understanding of media literacy, Weninger et al., (2017) three-item traditional understanding of MLE scale (reported $\alpha$ = .79) was combined with five items from their extended understanding of MLE scale (reported $\alpha$ = .72). The current study's final measure consisted of eight items ($\alpha$ = .88) that asked respondents, "To what extent is your personal knowledge about the field of media literacy?" Each survey item captured a different aspect of media literacy. The items included statements such as the following: "Media literacy education teaches students to... process and comprehend messages in media texts; be responsible media users; evaluate the credibility of texts." Response options ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). These items were summed and averaged for each respondent to create the media literacy knowledge scale, with higher scores indicating a stronger understanding of media literacy education. Table 1 provides participants' mean scores and standard deviations for the scale's items.

*Confidence integrating media literacy*. In order to investigate teachers' confidence integrating media literacy in their classes, a 13-item scale was constructed ($\alpha$ = .95) with items drawn from a measure developed by Simmons et al., (2017) along with definitions of media literacy (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2003). Respondents were asked, "To what extent do you believe you can integrate media literacy in your instruction," followed by statements on different ways that teachers integrate media literacy into their classes. The following are examples of some of the scale items: "I am confident that I can... help my students use media devices for technical purposes (e.g., computer, tablets, interactive whiteboard); teach my students how to conduct a close analysis of a media text (e.g., accuracy of information, perspective, purpose of message); help my students create media content (e.g., set up a blog, create a video document)." Identical to the media literacy conceptualization scale, response options ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Survey items were summed and averaged for each respondent to create the confidence integrating media literacy scale, with higher scores indicating more confidence integrating media literacy into respondents' courses. Table 2 provides participants' mean scores and standard deviations for each survey item on this scale.

*Integration of media literacy in courses*. In an effort to assess educators' integration of media literacy in the classroom, the same items from the media literacy efficacy scale were reworded and used to assess how often, if at all, educators integrate these different aspects of media literacy in their classes ($\alpha$ = .94). Respondents were asked, "To what extent do you incorporate media literacy into your instruction." The beginning of each item was changed from a statement that reflected confidence integrating media literacy (i.e., "I am confident that I can...") to actual integration in the classroom (i.e., "I teach my students..."). Response options for these survey items included the following 5-point scale: 1 (never), 2 (at least once during the course), 3 (at least once per month), 4 (at least once per week), and 5 (daily). Survey items were summed and averaged for each respondent to create the integration of media literacy in courses scale. Higher scores indicated more integration of media literacy in courses. Table 3 provides participants' mean scores and standard deviations for each survey item on this scale.

**RESULTS**

In an effort to better understand teachers' conceptualization of media literacy and their experiences incorporating media literacy into their classes, several different analyses were run to explore our data. Data from the scales of media literacy knowledge, confidence incorporating media literacy in classes, and the extent to which teachers incorporate media literacy, provide a picture of how the sample on average and as a whole experienced each of these study variables. Furthermore, it is of value to understand how teachers responded to each survey item individually. These data provide a clearer picture of the different

aspects of media literacy that teachers reported as part of media literacy education, as well as the specific types of media literacy they most often incorporate in their classes and which types they feel more or less confident incorporating in courses. Finally, correlations and independent sample t-tests were run to examine the relationship between demographic variables and the study's media literacy variables of interest.

## How teachers conceptualize media literacy

Research question 1 asked how teachers conceptualize media literacy. These items were measured on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). As a whole, survey respondents reported a relatively strong understanding of media literacy ($M = 4.08$, $SD = .62$).

Descriptive analyses of individual survey items (see Table 1) showed that respondents reported the highest agreement with the statement that "media literacy education teaches students to possess and comprehend messages in media texts" ($M = 4.33$, $SD = .71$).

The least agreement reported by teachers was with the survey item "media literacy education teaches students to appreciate the aesthetic design of media texts" ($M = 3.6$, $SD = .90$).

Table 1. *Media literacy knowledge*

| Survey Item | *n* | *M* | *SD* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Media literacy education teaches students to possess and comprehend messages in media texts | 71 | 4.33 | .71 |
| Media literacy education teaches students to evaluate the credibility of texts | 71 | 4.26 | .84 |
| Media literacy education teaches students to analyze the effects of messages on readers/viewers of media texts | 70 | 4.24 | .73 |
| In addition to traditional print media and digital forms of media, media literacy education should involve literary texts | 71 | 4.16 | .87 |
| Media literacy education teaches students to be responsible media users | 71 | 4.16 | .92 |
| Media literacy education teaches students to utilize media to engage in social and global issues | 71 | 4.08 | .82 |
| Media literacy education teaches students to be active creators of media texts | 71 | 3.85 | .89 |
| Media literacy education teaches students to appreciate the aesthetic design of media texts | 71 | 3.60 | .90 |

## Teacher confidence incorporating media literacy education

Research question 2 asked survey respondents to report their confidence integrating media literacy in their classes. Response options for this measure ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). On average, survey respondents reported some confidence incorporating media literacy in their classes ($M = 3.71$, $SD = .82$).

Descriptive analyses of survey items (see Table 2) indicated that teachers reported the highest level of confidence with helping students understand that media content is tailored to a target audience ($M = 4.04$, $SD = .84$), followed by helping students use media devices for technical purposes ($M = 4.02$, $SD = .96$). Teachers reported the least amount of confidence teaching students how media production and distribution works ($M = 2.95$, $SD = 1.23$) and helping students create media content ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 1.34$).

## Teachers' integration of media literacy education

Research question 3 asked the extent to which teachers report incorporating media literacy into their course. Here, we were interested in how often teachers incorporate different aspects of media literacy into their classes. Response options included: 1 (never), 2 (at least once during the course), 3 (at least once per month), 4 (at least once per week), and 5 (daily). On average, survey respondents reported integrating media literacy into their instruction between once a month and once during the course ($M = 2.36$, $SD = .93$). Descriptive analyses of scale items (see Table 3) indicated that teachers most often teach students how to use media devices for technical purposes ($M = 2.86$, $SD = 1.38$) and how to use sources of information and media devices effectively ($M = 2.75$, $SD = 1.21$). The least frequent types of media literacy integrated into classes included reports of teaching students how media production and distribution works ($M = 1.66$, $SD = 1.10$) and teaching students how to create media content ($M = 1.66$, $SD = 1.10$).

Table 2. *Confidence integrating media literacy*

| Survey Item | *n* | *M* | *SD* |
|---|---|---|---|
| I am confident that I can help my students understand that media content is tailored to a target audience | 67 | 4.04 | .84 |
| I am confident that I can help my students use media devices for technical purposes (e.g., computer, tablets, interactive whiteboard) | 69 | 4.02 | .96 |
| I am confident that I can teach my students that media have embedded values and points of view | 68 | 4.01 | .85 |
| I am confident that I can teach my students to be ethical users of media (e.g., not engaging in online bullying, not using media to falsify information) | 67 | 3.89 | 1.04 |
| I am confident that I can help my students use sources of information and media devices effectively (e.g., search information from social media sites and/or the internet) | 69 | 3.88 | 1.02 |
| I am confident that I can help students use modern media sources (e.g., websites, blogs, video games, software) | 68 | 3.82 | 1.07 |
| I am confident that I can teach my students how to conduct a close analysis of a media text (e.g., accuracy of information, perspective, purpose of message) | 67 | 3.80 | 1.09 |
| I am confident that I can help my students understand that all media messages are constructed | 67 | 3.74 | 1.03 |
| I am confident that I can teach students the effects of media (e.g., influence on purchasing behavior, undesired effects such as addiction or hate) | 67 | 3.73 | 1.02 |
| I am confident that I can teach my students how to conduct a close analysis of a media image (e.g., advertisements, films, book cover, photograph) | 68 | 3.70 | 1.07 |
| I am confident that I can help my students use media to engage in social and global issues | 68 | 3.54 | 1.16 |
| I am confident that I can help my students create media content (e.g., set up a blog, create a video document) | 67 | 3.08 | 1.34 |
| I am confident that I can teach my students how media production and distribution works | 68 | 2.95 | 1.23 |

Table 3. *Integration of media literacy in classes*

| Survey Item | *n* | *M* | *SD* |
|---|---|---|---|
| I teach my students how to use media devices for technical purposes (e.g., computer, tablets, interactive whiteboard) | 69 | 2.86 | 1.38 |
| I teach my students how to use sources of information and media devices effectively (e.g., search information from social media sites and/or the internet) | 69 | 2.75 | 1.21 |
| I teach my students to be ethical users of media (e.g., not engaging in online bullying, not using media to falsify information) | 69 | 2.65 | 1.21 |
| I teach my students that media have embedded values and points of view | 69 | 2.56 | 1.21 |
| I teach my students how to conduct a close analysis of a media text (e.g., accuracy of information, perspective, purpose of message) | 69 | 2.57 | 1.22 |
| I teach my students how to use modern media sources (e.g., websites, blogs, video games, software) | 69 | 2.49 | 1.33 |
| I teach my students to understand that media content is tailored to a target audience | 69 | 2.47 | 1.22 |
| I teach my students how to conduct a close analysis of a media image (e.g., advertisements, films, book cover, photograph) | 68 | 2.36 | 1.19 |
| I teach my students to understand that all media messages are constructed | 68 | 2.23 | 1.22 |
| I teach my students the effects of media (e.g., influence on purchasing behavior, undesired effects such as addiction or hate) | 69 | 2.11 | 1.09 |
| I teach my students how to use media to engage in social and global issues | 68 | 2.08 | 1.12 |
| I teach my students how to create media content (e.g., set up a blog, create a video document) | 68 | 1.85 | 1.13 |
| I teach my students how media production and distribution works | 69 | 1.66 | 1.10 |

**Relationships between demographic variables, media literacy knowledge, teacher confidence, and integration of media literacy**

Research question 4 explored the relationships between demographic variables and the study's key media literacy variables (i.e., knowledge of media literacy, confidence integrating media literacy, and integration of media literacy).

Pearson's correlations and independent sample t-tests were run to examine these relationships. Independent sample t-tests were run to assess whether

grade level[1], content taught, respondents' attendance at a course or workshop that incorporated media literacy, and teachers' efforts to research media literacy were related to the study's key media literacy variables. Teachers' grade level (i.e., middle school or high school) and content area (i.e., English language arts and social studies) were not significantly related to any of the study's key variables.

The media literacy workshop variable was only significantly related to integration of media literacy in the classroom. Specifically, there was a significant difference in integrating media literacy in classes for those who had taken a workshop that incorporated media literacy and those who had not. This finding suggests that teachers who had taken a workshop or course that incorporated media literacy ($M = 2.67$, $SD = 1.06$) were more likely to incorporate media literacy into their instruction, compared to those who had not ($M = 1.99$, $SD = .56$); $t(58) = 3.36$, $p = .001$. Teachers' reports of time spent researching media literacy was significantly related to all of the key media literacy variables in the study. Teachers who reported researching media literacy ($M = 4.37$, $SD = .42$) were significantly more knowledgeable about media literacy compared to those who did not spend time researching the topic ($M = 3.94$, $SD = .64$); $t(68) = 2.75$, $p = .008$. Additionally, teachers who reported researching media literacy ($M = 4.24$, $SD = .71$), compared to those who did not ($M = 3.47$, $SD = .75$); $t(67) = 3.95$, $p = .00$, were more likely to believe that they could incorporate it in their classes. Finally, teachers that reported having researched media literacy ($M = 3.23$, $SD = 1.03$) were more likely to incorporate it in their classes, compared to those that did not research media literacy ($M = 1.98$, $SD = .56$); $t(25) = 5.19$, $p = .00$.

Correlations were run to investigate relationships between the demographic variables of teachers' age, education, and years teaching, as well as number of media literacy workshops attended, and the SES level of the teachers' schools (see Table 4).

Table 4. *Teachers' reports of demographic variables and media literacy scales: correlations (n = 71)*

| Variables | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Age | - | | | | | | | |
| 2. Education | .11 | - | | | | | | |
| 3. Years teaching | .59** | .17 | - | | | | | |
| 4. SES of school | .01 | .06 | .32 | - | | | | |
| 5. Media literacy workshops | .05 | .07 | .19 | .45** | - | | | |
| 6. Media literacy knowledge | -.24* | .18 | -.07 | .10 | .09 | - | | |
| 7. Confidence integrating media literacy | -.22 | .03 | -.13 | -.09 | .16 | .34** | - | |
| 8. Integration of media literacy | -.47 | .21 | -.07 | .06 | .22 | .26* | .60** | - |

*p < .05. **p < .01

Teachers' reported level of education, years teaching, and the SES status of schools were not significantly related to any of the study's key variables. Also, the amount of courses or workshops attended by teachers that incorporated some component of media literacy education was not related to the study's key variables. Teachers' age was negatively correlated with personal knowledge of media literacy $r(68) = -.24$, $p = .046$, but not significantly related to any of the other media literacy variables.

Teachers' knowledge of media literacy was positively correlated with both confidence integrating media literacy in the classroom, $r(67) = .34$, $p = .004$, and the actual integration of media literacy in classes, $r(67) = .26$, $p = .030$. The strongest correlation was between teachers' confidence integrating media literacy and their integration of media literacy in classes, $r(67) = .60$, $p < .001$.

**Discussion**

This study focused on secondary teachers' conceptualization of media literacy, confidence incorporating media literacy education within instruction, and implementation of media literacy education in the classroom. One of our overarching goals was to explore the various aspects of each of these media literacy variables and to examine if and how they

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[1] Due to low sample size, librarians were not included in analysis. Grade level taught was recomputed into a binary variable with the categories of middle and high school.

might relate to one another. As mentioned earlier, this research should add to the small, but growing, body of literature that investigates educators' knowledge of and experience with media literacy education.

In terms of how teachers conceptualize media literacy, our study participants reported fairly high levels of knowledge about media literacy and on average agreed more with survey items that illustrate a "traditional understanding of media literacy education" (Weninger et al., 2017, p. 433). These findings are similar to other studies that have found agreement among educators that media literacy education involves critical examination of media texts, with a focus on media effects (e.g., Weninger et al., 2017). According to these scholars, an extended understanding of media literacy education includes media production, a broader conceptualization of media (e.g., including literacy texts), and teaching students to be more mindful of their media use. Our sample of teachers and librarians on average did indeed agree with the extended definition of media literacy scale items, but less so than the traditional items. This finding suggests that media literacy training for teachers that incorporates components of this extended understanding of media literacy education might broaden educators' conceptualization of MLE, as well as provide them with more options for incorporating media literacy in classes.

Media literacy knowledge was also impacted by age. Our research found that as teachers' age increased, they reported less knowledge of media literacy. Although there is not much research on media literacy knowledge and teachers' age, our finding is in contrast research by Schmidt (2013), who found that teachers who were older and had more teaching experiences were more likely to implement media literacy practices within their classrooms than younger teachers with less experiences. We concur with Schmidt (2013) when he suggests that "training and experience – and not the youth or digital nativity of educators – are the most significant factors associated with teaching about media literacy" (p. 301). In fact, research indicates that there has been a lack of training for teachers in media literacy education at all levels (e.g., Gretter & Yadav, 2018; Hobbs, 2008; Scull & Kupersmidt, 2011). Thus, continuing education workshops and media literacy resources for teachers should target veteran teachers, who like our sample of teachers, may be less knowledgeable about media literacy education.

Our findings also indicate that teachers expressed a fair amount of confidence integrating media literacy within their instruction. Analysis of the individual scale items show that survey respondents felt fairly confident teaching students about media use, both technically and ethically. Several items that teachers expressed less confidence about relate to what Simmons et al., (2017) refer to as "contributing medially" (p. 107) or "competencies related to the creation and the communication of media messages as well as to participation using media" (p. 107). Specifically, these items were helping students engage in social and global issues using media and creating media content. Teachers reported the least amount of confidence in teaching about the media industry (i.e., production and distribution), however, because we did not assess teachers' level of knowledge in this area, we cannot conclude lack of knowledge is related to lack of confidence. It is unclear why particular types of media literacy pedagogy were related to more or less confidence among our sample of teachers. Further research should explore this aspect of media literacy education and its relationship to teachers' media literacy education and training.

Although it appears that our sample as a whole was knowledgeable about media literacy and fairly confident in their ability to integrate it in the classroom, actual integration of media literacy education appeared to be limited. On average, survey respondents reported integrating media into their instruction several times, or less, during a course. The highest integration measures were those relating to teaching how to use media devices (e.g., computers, tablets) and sources of information, as well as ethical use of media. This may be a result of class assignments and activities that incorporate some type of technology. Identical to the confidence measure, teachers were least likely to teach students about engagement in social and global issues using media and media production.

Finally, our findings indicate that both media literacy knowledge and teachers' confidence incorporating media literacy in classes relate to the likelihood that they will integrate media literacy in their instruction. As respondents' knowledge of media literacy increased, so did their confidence integrating media literacy within their instruction and the likelihood that they would integrate it in their classes. The strongest relationship, however, was between teachers' confidence integrating media literacy and their actual integration of media literacy. This finding is similar to other studies that have found self-efficacy to be more important to integration of media literacy than knowledge of media literacy on a variety of teaching practices, including technology

integration (e.g., Abbitt, 2011; Bauer & Kenton, 2005; Piper, 2003).

Despite these findings, our study is limited in the conclusions we can draw from our results. The cross-sectional nature of our data only allows us to examine relationships between variables, rather than investigate causation. Additionally, our sample consisted of teachers from higher SES schools; exploring the knowledge and experiences of teachers from lower income schools would be incredibly valuable. Our sample was also exclusively Caucasian, which limits our understanding of how teachers of different races experience media literacy education. Finally, these data provide teachers' reports of their integration of media literacy education within the classroom, rather than actual integration. Future studies might collect students' media literacy assignments to assess the effectiveness of integration and media literacy learning.

Although the results of our analyses can only show relationships between variables, it is important that these relationships are further explored in future research. Investigating the role of media literacy knowledge and confidence as predictors of media literacy integration, might facilitate the design of media literacy workshops or college curriculum for teachers and educators. In fact, how teachers gain media literacy knowledge may also be an important factor to consider when exploring what might lead to media literacy integration in classes. Our results suggest that teachers who took a media literacy workshop were more likely to integrate it in their classes. Additionally, teachers who took the initiative to research media literacy on their own were also more likely to incorporate media literacy in classes. This might suggest that a teacher's personal initiative for learning may drive integration. Indeed, teachers' initiative or what Culver and Redmond (2019) refer to as "self taught" (p. 4) learning is a common way that teachers gain knowledge about media literacy, even more than formalized education or workshops. It is evident that further research is needed to explore this finding.

## CONCLUSION

It is clear from our research that teachers' media literacy confidence and knowledge are associated with their integration of media literacy and their classroom media literacy practices. As such, professional development opportunities for teachers in media literacy education need to be a priority for school districts. Although research in this area is scarce, we do know that

one of the barriers to media literacy integration is a lack of professional development (Belova & Eilks, 2016; Hattani, 2019). Indeed, media literacy training for teachers has led to increased knowledge about media literacy and increased beliefs about the importance of media literacy (e.g., Huguet et al., 2019; Scull & Kupersmidt, 2011). Accordingly, we concur with Huguet et al. (2019) who recommend additional media literacy training for all teachers. Specifically, they call for research that compares media literacy professional development that occurs over brief and extended time periods, research on how media literacy training is delivered (i.e., online, face-to-face), and research focused on the content of that training (i.e., critical analysis of media messages, media production). Because school administrators act as policy makers who influence curricular decisions of their schools (Anderson & Dexter, 2005; Mahoney & Khwaja, 2016), we also recommend research that focuses not only on the training of classroom teachers but on school administrators as well.

There is also a desperate need for training in media literacy and media literacy coursework in the higher education setting, particularly within preservice teacher training programs (Hobbs, 2010). Currently, most teacher preparation programs do not include media literacy education within their curricula (Tiede et al., 2015). Although current pre-service teachers have grown up surrounded by technology and media, this does not mean that they have an understanding of how to translate that knowledge into effective pedagogy. Nor does technology competence suggest that pre-service teachers value the importance of media literacy integration within their future classroom (Gretter & Yadav, 2018). Broadening teacher preparation standards to include competencies in media literacy education will help to ensure future educators have the requisite knowledge to teach students how to successfully navigate the changing media landscape.

Finally, although there has been an increase in media literacy legislation across the United States, the majority of the 50 states still lack laws specific to media literacy education. Only two states, Florida and Ohio, have language that requires the development of media literacy standards (Media Literacy Now, 2020). It is unclear the impact of these laws on media literacy education within our school systems, and unless states are proactive in setting legislation that requires schooling in media literacy, media literacy education will be seen by educators as an accoutrement that gets relegated to the bottom of an already full list of things to teach.

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