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Article:	Teachers' Perspectives of Children Empowerment through Media Literacy in Islamabad
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Abstract

Media literacy is an emergent field in developed countries and became an integral part of the school system and has been integrated in the educational curriculum. The present paper highlights the teachers' perception regarding media literacy awareness and their opinions and readiness of media literacy at school level. The study used constructivist learning theory for theoretical framework. This study supports constructivist learning theory that transforms students being passive recipient to more active participant in getting the information for their learning process and hence helps in preparing children to explore, investigate and experiment with the media available in the classroom. The study has shown that teachers are not well aware of media literacy concept and the teaching of media literacy through rote learning or traditional practice may not produce productive results. The curriculum needs to aim at the active participation of students by making the lessons functional and would provide students with competences and critical approach towards mediated content rather than becoming passive consumer of media.

Keywords: children; teachers; media literacy; empowerment; Pakistan

Introduction

In Pakistan, the concept of media literacy is at the primitive stage. The majority masses are still unaware of the concept of media literacy. Majority of the people confuse media literacy with the usage of media technology such as TV/LED, computer, Internet, videogames, laptop, iPad, game consoles by individuals. In this contemporary world the continuous advancements in media technology including Internet, smart phones, advertisements, videogames, and 3D animated movies have been a major source of entertainment for the children in Pakistan. Moreover, they thus have mostly regular and constant access to media in the absence of any adult supervision. The immersion in media devices by children on regular basis has become the serious growing concern of mostly parents and teachers in Pakistan. Furthermore, parents and teachers are concerned regarding children's vulnerability and susceptibility to understand, evaluate and analyze the media content and messages which cause harmful impacts on children's cognitive, intellectual and psychological development.

Different past studies revealed that the media usage in school meant not only to increase the interest level of children but also promoted active participation among children in the classroom. In Pakistan, the media usage at schools aims to develop the interest level of students and to maintain the discipline of the class by keeping children busy or quiet in the classroom rather than endorse critical thinking skills among them. Such multifaceted understandings of present media compel a refined set of tools that child must be taught in this digitalized world. Thus, this requires a shift from traditional methods to more innovative approaches for learning process under present information and communication technology (ICTs). Suleman (2008) maintained that the primary level is considered as a critical phase in the child's learning life. If a teacher accomplishes in framing a comprehensive knowledge base and providing proper guidance to make the whole concept clear to a student then in the future students would be able to grip testing things more easily. Therefore, it is crucial to assess awareness level of the teachers, their judgments and willingness for media literacy.

Literature Review

Teachers' knowledge regarding children's understanding of media message and meaning enable teacher to provide them proper guidance and facilitate them to ask more deeper questions related to the information they need and will be helpful for the teacher to instruct them how to critique, analyze, express their own perceptive (Shore, 2009). A study conducted by Marie-Anne et al. (2012) revealed the positive response of teachers towards technology usage. The teachers felt contented while using technology in the classroom such as using email, showing videos and overhead projectors. The teachers perceived the usage of technology beneficial for motivating students' interest level and engaged them in a more effective way of thinking and hence, better able to exercise performing skills, which would be difficult through traditional based learning system. The teacher's involvement in the technology based classroom increase the student's interest level and this would further enhance teachers' participation in using technology effectively for teaching purpose (Royer, 2002). Teacher's training regarding technology usage would more likely encourage and motivate teachers to incorporate it effectively in the classroom (Savery, 2002; Hsu, 2010). Barbara (1996) maintained that teachers have been using "developmentally appropriate practices are doing more to promote critical thinking than traditional teachers who believe children are too young to think well" (p. 2). Jones and Flannigan (2006) urged the proper guidance and training for teachers for the successful implementation of technology in the classroom. The lack of knowledge and awareness regarding technology among teachers would result in reluctance and hesitance shown by teachers in the class. Khokhar and Javaid (2016) maintained that in Pakistan the technology usage in schools has not proved satisfactory results. The study found that students perceived lack of ICT knowledge and skills among teachers. Students showed great interest that their teachers should use ICT more in

teaching and assessment activities because these ICTs have been widely used among students on regular basis at home. The vast majority of teachers acknowledged the development of critical stance towards the constructed nature of media. Germann and Sasse (1997) found the successful teachers participation in a two-year technology integration program, which had improved their technology self-efficacy. Moreover, the interest level of teachers also raised; and motivated towards gaining more knowledge and awareness regarding technology in order to positively impact the course. Teachers play an important role in the educational setup therefore, teachers' training should be focused and make them convinced regarding the benefits of media usage and encourage them to use technology among themselves before using it in the classroom (Lam, 2000).

Another study found the positive and satisfactory attitude of the teachers towards media literacy integration in the classrooms. Teachers strongly recommended the presence of mass media in the media literacy lesson (Sur et al., 2014). The media literacy of teachers would also considered very important factor for the successful introduction of media literacy in any school setting, because only a media literate teacher could develop the skills of media literacy among the students and yield fruitful results (Valdmane, 2016). Kellner and Share (2007) stressed the need of "critical pedagogy". Similarly, Inan and Temur (2012) suggested "in-service training opportunities" for the teachers regarding media literacy. Recepoğlu (2015) stressed on teachers' training and recommended to have more seminars and programs organized in this context. Ružić-Baf et al. (2016) recommended incorporating media education in the early years of children schooling. As a result, parents and teachers need to teach and provide proper teaching of ICT to their children. "Early prevention and efficient education" is necessary for the healthy growing of children alongside the technologies.

Theoretical Framework

The Constructivist Learning theory is used as a theoretical framework for this study. In the early half of the 20th century media literacy was mostly encouraged by protectionist paradigm. In this early protectionist approach, Buckingham (2003) claims that media literacy education in the US is impacted by various concerns regarding media effects including sex and violence and the media's role in promoting "consumerism or materialism". Subsequently the supporters of media literacy mostly suggested this protectionist paradigm as they assumed media being harmful and children should be protected from its effect. Similarly some parents supported the censorship as the best way to keep away their children from unsuitable content. Instead of censorship scholars should teach children and adults how to critically evaluate and interpret media messages. Media educationalists that represented protectionist model did not offer their schoolchildren with a analytical skill or empowering instructional experience. Therefore, it would be better to teach children and provide them guidance to manage these media messages instead of criticizing the media usage (Schilder, 2014).

Freire (2000) opposed the "banking system" of education where the role of the teacher is simply "deposit the knowledge" and students like "empty vessels" passively collect and stock knowledge as "depositories". This education system 'banking system' treats the student as passive. Therefore he appeals for a new critical pedagogy in which the role of the student is an active participant rather than passive receiver and become critical thinkers and "inquirers and should co-construct and transform reality". According to Vygotsky (1978), Learning is not simply about to explore or about to receive the mediated ideas passively. He defines the zone of proximal development as "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86). Postman and Weingartner (1969) explained that the role of educator in Constructivism is to hardly inform students about the personal opinion, encourages student-student interaction rather than student-teacher interaction, being a mentor or guide and

responses of the students to drive the discussion. Hobbs and Jensen (2009) who also support and Influenced by Freire (2000), Postman and Weingartner (1969), and Vygotsky (1978), and Buckingham (1998), argue that media literacy education development is extension towards democratization of education. In democratic approach, Masterman was most prominent advocator of this move. He argued that certain conditions and situations are essential for media literacy education to progress and advance, such as "non-hierarchical teaching modes and a methodology which will promote reflection and critical thinking whilst being as lively, democratic, group-focused and action-oriented" (Masterman, 1985, p. 27).

This study supports the idea of preparing students instead of protecting them from the harmful consequences of media effects. Media literacy relatively implements a more student-centered approach to teaching and learning (Masterman, 1985). Generally, the audience has come to be seen as more and more "active and selective" in their use and interpretation of media messages and texts (Jensen & Rosengren, 1990). Ertmer and Newby (1993) mentioned that learners are active in processing information and also active in creating meanings as well in constructivism. According to Jonassen (1991) "our world is created by our minds, so no world is more real than another world". Duffy and Jonassen (1992) argue that with the advancements in technology and the information provides new opportunities led the scholars to return to constructivism. Lattuca (2006) states that constructivism is a learning theory based on the concept that students construct or create knowledge from existing knowledge. Tyner (2010) stated that the constructivist Model of Media Literacy uses student media knowledge and experiences to increase their understanding of media.

Brooks and Brooks (1993) mentioned that "Teachers who operate without awareness of their students point of view often doom students to dull, irrelevant experiences and even sometimes failure" (p. 60). Knabe (2004) maintained that knowledge is entrenched in activity: not professorial lectures or simple memorization of facts. Constructivist theory also expands on the student's already previous knowledge (Hobbs & Jensen, 2009). The professor while initiating discussion with the students never give his/her viewpoint before asking questions from students and understating their viewpoints and opinion (Postman & Weingartner, 1969; Brooks & Brooks, 1993). Mostly scholars agreed that the focus should be more preparing students rather protecting them.

Research Question

What are the teachers' perception regarding their own media literacy awareness and how do they perceive introduction of media literacy at primary school level in Islamabad?

Research Method

The researcher conducted Qualitative research method based on interviewing eighteen class teachers of class three and class five from six public and private schools in Islamabad, Pakistan. The interviews were conducted to develop understanding about teachers' perception regarding their own awareness about media literacy, its significance value for children and willingness to introduce media literacy in schools for children empowerment. The participants were purposefully selected from primary schools. The face-to face interviews were conducted in their schools. Six schools were randomly selected from Islamabad that includes three private and three public schools. The data of public schools were obtained from Federal Directorate of Education and private schools data collected from Private Educational Institutions Regulatory Authority (PEIRA). Out of 186 primary public schools and from 274 private schools, only six schools were randomly chosen from Islamabad.

Findings and Discussion

The Predominantly female teachers responded to the interview questions. Concerning the teachers' academic qualifications, most of the teachers were educated beyond high school. Some teachers had a bachelor's degree, master's degree and also had an MPhil degree. The data suggests that mostly students are well aware of education system and

technologies available in their schools. The age range of the teachers was 32 to 41 years. Hence, they are able to provide relevant information regarding their own perception of media literacy awareness and its implementation in the primary school level. Regarding working experience, mostly teachers have maximum experience of 10 years to the minimum experience of 5 years. This demonstrates that good number of teachers has been taught in their respective schools for a significant period of time; therefore, they are in a better position to describe their perception regarding media literacy.

The responses of the teachers revealed that the term media literacy for the participants is still vague and almost all the participants had no idea about media literacy. Some teachers misunderstood media literacy with the different forms of media usage such as Television, computers, iPad, and smart phones among individuals. Some mentioned that the media technologies using in the classroom is called media literacy. Moreover, some teachers heard about media literacy for the first time. The teachers mentioned that they had not heard about media literacy before but it must be something related to the media. Generally, this indicates the ignorance regarding media literacy among teachers. The teachers said:

"I believe media literacy is the presence of media technology which we use in the classroom such as television and computer" (T2)

"I have no understanding what media literacy is. Actually, I am hearing it for the first time but I think it must be something related to the media or technology which we are using" (T6)

When teachers were explained about the term media literacy by the researcher then almost all the teachers have shown positive response towards media literacy. The teachers said:

"Yes, there is no doubt then media literacy is very effective for the children of today age. Children need to be critical thinkers in today's world and this can be easily done with the help of this subject" (T7)

"I believe it is very necessary because children involve with media anywhere and due to media literacy they will gain more knowledge and understandings about how to use media devices and its content critically and in a sensible way" (T8)

On asking teachers about their willingness for the implementation of media literacy at primary school level, all teachers have shown strong willingness towards media literacy implementation into the curriculum at primary schools. Teachers mentioned that while considering the younger age group of children and their deep involvement with the media devices on daily basis triggered the implementation of this term [Media Literacy] at primary school level. The teachers said:

"I am willing to have media literacy in the curriculum and in this regard school administration should develop some strategies or programs to implement media literacy at school level" (T1)

"I recommend that school managers or principals should design a plan for the integration of media literacy effectively in the educational curriculum" (T2)

The teachers further expressed that for the successful implementation of media literacy in the curriculum, there would be some workshop or training sessions regarding media literacy for the teachers in school. The school administration would be responsible for organizing such training programs, workshop or seminars in order to raise the awareness of media literacy among teachers, students and even parents. Both parents and teachers have major role in the children's lives therefore, their understanding and awareness of media literacy is highly important. Without the proper understanding and awareness of media literacy, it would be difficult for teachers to teach children properly in school. The responses of the teachers further revealed that children should be encouraged to use the media devices in a positive way. As it has been difficult to prevent children from media device usage as they have an easy access to these technologies everywhere. Children should be encouraged to use

media devices as mean to understand technology as well. For this purpose children should be motivated and encouraged to use technology for the learning purposes. The teachers said:

"I think there should be some workshops regarding media literacy for the teachers to make them understand and aware about the subject properly so that teachers feel comfortable in implementing media literacy in the class" (T8)

"I agree and more willing to be the part of that workshop. School should organize this workshop to make teachers aware of the term properly. After all teachers understanding is considered important because in the classroom teachers will be able to teach media literacy lessons or skills to the students" (T7)

In interviews teachers were asked to describe their understanding of what media literacy is to them. It was found that the teachers have no awareness of media literacy and neither did have this course taught in the schools. Majority of the teachers mentioned that they had not heard about the concept of media literacy before. Therefore, the findings of the study indicated the lack of media literacy awareness among teachers that shows the uniqueness of media literacy in Islamabad, Pakistan.

Later on when teachers were informed by the researcher about "media literacy" and its significance value for the young children empowerment, then almost all the teachers agreed to the fact that media literacy is effective for the children as it's entirely a new field of study for the children who would grow up in this technology world. The constant involvement of children with media devices and its harmful impacts has been the growing concern among teachers. Teachers responded that children being innocent and vulnerable would not be able to use media in an effective way. The extreme involvement of children with such media devices is found almost everywhere so that children understanding and knowledge would be upgraded as the technology has been advancing with the rapid pace. Therefore, teachers agreed to the fact that empowering children through media literacy is the need of the day.

The study findings indicated that all the teachers showed positive attitude and willingness for the implementation of media literacy in educational curriculum. They all agreed to the fact that such a subject (media literacy) can be successful and yield productive results for the empowerment of children and it has the potential to be introduced in school. Similarly, teachers reflected on the fact that they do not have a set curriculum that can teach and arouse children's critical thinking skills. But even then, these teachers do practice some activity that can be helpful for the children. But most essentially, teaching children about media should be the primary role of teachers at school, and this could be done, if and only media literacy is integrated into the educational curriculum. In this regard the curriculum planners need to take this initiative. Based on these comments, it was quite clear that teachers were in favor of integrating media literacy into the school curriculum. Teachers clearly feel that, it is of equal importance to have a discussion based activity at school considering the positive and harmful aspects of media content and messages. They feel it is exceptionally important for children to promote analytical attitude toward media and to guarantee that children become consistently inquiring media sources. The study findings confirm that teachers showed strong willingness for the implementation of media literacy in educational curriculum. All the answers given by teachers confirmed the attainment of the fact that they are willing to introduce media literacy in schools in order to empower young children that can be beneficial in enhancing critical thinking skills.

Based on the findings, critical thinking is one of the most important elements in media literacy that enhances audiences' analysis skills, decoding media messages, disbelief of media messages and its potential influences. Continuing concerns about possible negative influences of media on children, educators and policy makers should pledge to make media literacy an essential part of every individual's education. This guideline aimed at the

educators who should serve as a platform to initiate and give an introduction to media literacy education. Since, media is being consumed by children all day long, hence an alternative need to be sought that will empower children to minimize these effects on them. Reflecting back to the various definitions of media literacy, it simply states that individuals should be able to get access to media content and should be able to analyze, evaluate, and critically reflect upon and interpret various media messages. Likewise who created a particular message? What techniques are used to attract the audiences? What sort of things has been absent in the meaning of the content? These are the few questions with which children must be aware at the time of using media. The knowledge and understanding of the proper usage of media for children is very timely. Children need to watch any program, movies, cartoons, games, in fact all the content with the critical point of view. Therefore, once these skills are mastered, it will make individuals competent enough to create media content, although every individual might not require this. Therefore, a very strong support for media literacy education exists among teachers to introduce this subject in schools. Also, a teacher during the interview said that, "I understand that creation of media content is one dimension of media literacy, therefore, students should not only know the deconstruction but also the construction of media messages, but the skill to understand media messages should be of the first priority".

According to the response of the teachers, they believed that they can play a vital role in increasing the level of awareness about the media provided it is introduced in the school curriculum. Teachers reflected that they do not have a set curriculum that can teach and arouse children critical thinking skills. But most essentially, teaching children about media should be the primary role of teachers at school, and this could be done, if only media literacy is integrated into the educational curriculum. In fact, some teachers are of the opinion that some introductory programs or workshops should be introduced in schools and the feedback of parents and children will determine if media literacy should be considered to be the part of the curriculum. Therefore, teachers believe that parents as well as teachers play a more important role in mitigating the effect of media on children.

Conclusion

This study urges the introduction of media literacy into curriculum of the primary schools. The traditional approach to learning is outdated and the traditional strategies such as censorship or limitation are no longer effective. However, students are no longer motivated by the traditional way of instructional practices. Traditional literacy at schools lacking modern contents that enable students to process the information and analyze those information in a media rich environment. Furthermore, the experiences of new devices available to children provide interactivity and connectivity continuously. Therefore, media literacy cannot be taught through traditional teaching practices. With the upcoming advances in technology, it is responsibility of the schools to prepare their students to use media properly. The immensity of media is making it necessary to introduce media literacy in the curriculum to enable children to actively face the digital world. Therefore, children urgently need an education that can help children become media literate by teaching them how to cope with the opportunities and risks associated with media.

The study has shown that teachers are not well aware of media literacy concept and the teaching of media literacy through rote learning or traditional practice may not produce productive results. The curriculum need to aim at the active participation of students by making the lessons functional and would provide students with competences and critical approach towards mediated content rather than becoming passive consumer of media. In terms of curriculum, the technology is integrated into schools; therefore, teachers should know the art of using this technology for learning process. Therefore, teachers need to reform their methodological instructions from teaching through media to teaching about media. The

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teaching of media literacy in the classroom can be best implemented with participatory interactivity, instructional methods of pedagogy and discussion based activities. Students with the teachers' guidance enhance their own knowledge and construct their own meanings instead of only relying textbook or teacher. With the constructivist approach students develop a sense of ownership about their work and later feel empowered. This study supports constructivist learning theory that changes the children towards active participants from passive consumer or recipients of information and hence helps in preparing children to explore, investigate and experiment with the media available in the classroom. The active participation in constructivist learning empower the students to critically analyze the media messages.

For children empowerment through media literacy, the role of teacher is the important. For children empowerment, first teachers have media literacy education. If teachers are provided proper media literacy trainings, then these teachers are able to teach students media literacy and students would be able to understand media messages. Teachers along with their own subjects would be able to teach their students regarding media. Also, the government can possibly integrate media literacy into the curriculum and ensure pedagogical support for the teachers. Therefore, it must also be noted that even though the agreed consensus of teachers about the need of media literacy at schools and willingness for media literacy, but there is no such media literacy contents are developed for them. Therefore for the contribution towards media literacy, it is essential to develop media contents for teachers. As far as media literacy is concerned, this research has clearly confirmed this need and the findings of this research may motivate our educational policy makers to work for the implementation of media literacy at schools levels.

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