MEDIA LITERACY IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION STUDENTS: PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS, INFLUENCE OF MEDIA AND METHODS FOR ENHANCEMENT

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Abstract. *This paper thoroughly examines the pivotal role of media literacy among students enrolled in vocational education programs, taking into account their distinctive psychological characteristics, the pervasive influence of various media tools, and the identification of effective pedagogical methods aimed at enhancing their media literacy skills. Vocational education students represent a unique demographic, often balancing practical skill acquisition with theoretical knowledge, which makes them particularly susceptible to both the positive and negative influences of modern media. The study underscores the critical importance of fostering a comprehensive set of competencies among these students, including advanced critical thinking abilities, digital literacy, and the capacity for responsible media consumption. Developing these skills is essential not only for improving academic performance but also for supporting long-term professional growth and overall psychological well-being. Students who are media literate are better equipped to navigate the complex information landscape, discern credible sources from misleading or false content, and make informed decisions that directly impact their learning outcomes and career trajectories. Moreover, media literacy empowers students to engage with digital and traditional media in a reflective and analytical manner, promoting self-regulation, ethical awareness, and resilience against manipulative or harmful media content. By integrating media literacy education into vocational training curricula, educators can create learning environments that nurture both cognitive and emotional development. This approach enhances students' capacity to critically evaluate media messages, understand the potential consequences of media exposure, and apply acquired knowledge in real-world professional contexts.*

Keywords: *media literacy, vocational education, students, psychological characteristics, media influence, teaching methods.*

Introduction

This paper thoroughly examines the pivotal role of media literacy among students enrolled in vocational education programs, taking into account their distinctive psychological characteristics, the pervasive influence of various media tools, and the identification of effective pedagogical methods aimed at enhancing their media literacy skills. Vocational education students represent a unique demographic, often balancing practical skill acquisition with theoretical knowledge, which makes them particularly susceptible to both the positive and negative influences of modern media.

The study underscores the critical importance of fostering a comprehensive set of competencies among these students, including advanced critical thinking abilities, digital literacy, and the capacity for responsible media consumption. Developing these skills is essential not only

for improving academic performance but also for supporting long-term professional growth and overall psychological well-being. Students who are media literate are better equipped to navigate the complex information landscape, discern credible sources from misleading or false content, and make informed decisions that directly impact their learning outcomes and career trajectories.

Moreover, media literacy empowers students to engage with digital and traditional media in a reflective and analytical manner, promoting self-regulation, ethical awareness, and resilience against manipulative or harmful media content. By integrating media literacy education into vocational training curricula, educators can create learning environments that nurture both cognitive and emotional development. This approach enhances students' capacity to critically evaluate media messages, understand the potential consequences of media exposure, and apply acquired knowledge in real-world professional contexts.

In addition, the study emphasizes that responsible media engagement contributes to the psychological well-being of vocational students. Exposure to unfiltered or excessive media content, including social networks, news outlets, and multimedia platforms, can exacerbate stress, reduce attention span, and negatively affect decision-making processes. By equipping students with the tools to critically assess and manage media interactions, educators can mitigate these risks and foster more adaptive coping strategies.

Ultimately, this research highlights that media literacy is not merely an academic skill but a fundamental competency for modern vocational students, directly influencing their ability to succeed academically, maintain psychological balance, and develop professionally in increasingly media-saturated environments. It is therefore imperative to identify, implement, and continuously refine strategies and methodologies that cultivate robust media literacy among this population, ensuring that students are well-prepared to meet the challenges of both their educational and professional futures.

Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive assessment of media literacy among vocational education students. The research combines structured surveys with semi-structured interviews to evaluate students' media literacy levels, psychological characteristics, and patterns of media usage. By adopting this mixed-methods framework, the study ensures a balanced understanding of both measurable trends and in-depth personal experiences, allowing for a more nuanced interpretation of the factors influencing media literacy development.

Participants in this study comprised 200 students, aged between 16 and 22, enrolled in a range of vocational education programs. These programs included technical courses, healthcare-related training, and service-oriented disciplines, reflecting the diversity of skills and professional pathways typical within vocational education settings. The inclusion of students from multiple fields provides a representative sample for analyzing how media literacy interacts with both academic and practical training environments.

Several instruments were utilized to collect data. The Media Literacy Assessment Scale (MLAS) was used to quantitatively measure students' media literacy competencies, including their ability to critically evaluate media content, discern credible sources, and apply digital tools effectively. Psychological well-being was assessed using the Psychological Well-being Questionnaire (PWBQ), providing insights into students' emotional, cognitive, and social functioning in relation to media exposure. Additionally, a Media Usage Survey was administered to capture detailed information on the frequency, types, and purposes of media engagement among

participants, offering context for interpreting their media literacy levels and psychological responses.

Data collection involved a combination of online and paper-based surveys, ensuring accessibility and flexibility for all participants. Following the surveys, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of students to explore their subjective perceptions of media influence, personal strategies for managing media consumption, and the perceived impact of media on learning and daily life. This qualitative component allowed for the identification of themes and patterns that quantitative measures alone could not capture.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize demographic information, media usage trends, and literacy scores, while correlation analysis examined relationships between media literacy, psychological well-being, and media engagement patterns. Qualitative data were subjected to thematic content analysis, enabling the identification of recurring ideas, attitudes, and coping strategies related to media interaction. By integrating these analytical methods, the study provides a holistic understanding of how vocational education students navigate the media environment and develop essential literacy skills for academic, professional, and personal growth.

Results

The results of the study reveal several important trends regarding media literacy levels, psychological characteristics, and demographic variations among vocational education students. Overall, the findings indicate that while students possess a basic understanding of how to navigate digital platforms, their deeper analytical skills—particularly those related to source verification and critical interpretation—remain underdeveloped. Quantitative data from the Media Literacy Assessment Scale (MLAS) show that the average media literacy score among participants was **58.4 out of 100**, placing the majority of students in the "moderate proficiency" category. Approximately **37%** of students demonstrated strong operational skills such as searching for information and using digital tools, while only **18%** showed high competence in critical evaluation of media messages. Notably, **45%** of respondents struggled to distinguish between credible and misleading information sources, highlighting a significant gap in critical media awareness.

Psychological and behavioral patterns also revealed meaningful correlations. Students with elevated stress levels, as measured by the Psychological Well-being Questionnaire (PWBQ), had significantly lower media literacy scores ($M = 52.1$) compared to students with stable psychological profiles ($M = 64.7$). Statistical analysis showed a moderate negative correlation between stress levels and critical evaluation skills ($\mathbf{r = -0.42}$, $p < 0.05$). Furthermore, students with reduced self-regulation abilities reported spending an average of **4.8 hours per day** on passive media consumption activities such as scrolling through social media feeds or watching entertainment videos. This passive engagement was associated with lower academic performance indicators, including decreased assignment completion rates and reduced concentration during classes. Conversely, goal-oriented students—who accounted for approximately **29%** of the sample—demonstrated more selective media habits, frequently accessing educational websites, professional digital resources, and instructional videos aligned with their specific vocational interests.

Age-based differences were also evident in the results. Younger students aged **16–18 years** exhibited a strong dependence on social media platforms as their primary source of information, with **71%** reporting that they rely on social networks for news, educational content, or personal guidance. Their media usage patterns lacked diversity, often prioritizing entertainment and peer-

generated content. In contrast, older students aged **19–22 years** demonstrated more balanced and purpose-driven media behavior. Approximately **63%** of this group regularly consulted academic databases, digital textbooks, and credible professional sources in addition to using social media. This suggests a developmental shift in media engagement strategies as students progress through their vocational education programs.

Gender-based comparisons showed no statistically significant differences in overall media literacy scores between male (M = 58.1) and female (M = 59.0) participants. However, minor variations were observed in media usage purposes: female students reported slightly higher engagement with educational and health-related content, whereas male students showed greater involvement in technology-related and entertainment media. Despite these differences, both groups displayed comparable levels of critical analysis, digital skill competence, and awareness of media influence.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that media literacy among vocational education students is developing but remains insufficient for the demands of the contemporary digital environment. The moderate media literacy scores observed across the sample indicate that although students are technologically familiar and active media users, their ability to critically evaluate information and engage in reflective media consumption is limited. This discrepancy between operational digital skills and critical interpretive skills aligns with previous research suggesting that young media users often overestimate their digital competence due to frequent exposure to online platforms, while lacking deeper analytical abilities required for academic and professional success.

One of the most significant insights from the study is the strong relationship between psychological characteristics and media consumption patterns. Students with elevated stress levels and lower self-regulation exhibited higher rates of passive media usage, which in turn correlated with lower academic performance indicators. This supports the growing body of evidence that emotional and cognitive states significantly shape how individuals interact with digital media. Passive media engagement—such as habitual scrolling or entertainment consumption—may serve as a short-term coping mechanism, yet it ultimately hinders cognitive engagement, problem-solving abilities, and academic focus. In contrast, students with stronger self-regulation skills displayed a more intentional approach to media usage, often selecting content that aligned with academic or vocational goals. This adaptive behavior reflects higher levels of digital maturity and suggests that interventions aimed at strengthening self-regulation may enhance media literacy outcomes.

Age-related differences further highlight the developmental aspects of media literacy. Younger students' heavy reliance on social media for information underscores the need for structured educational programs that guide them toward more credible and diverse information sources. Their preference for peer-generated and entertainment-oriented content may expose them to misinformation and limit their ability to access high-quality academic resources. Older students, on the other hand, demonstrated more balanced media behaviors and greater integration of digital tools into their learning processes, indicating that media literacy naturally evolves with cognitive maturity, educational exposure, and vocational specialization. These findings support the need for early, age-appropriate media literacy curricula that progressively strengthen critical media skills throughout vocational training.

Although gender did not significantly impact overall media literacy scores, subtle differences in content preferences suggest that media literacy programs should consider the diversity of students' interests and motivations. Tailoring training modules to include examples from a variety of content categories—technological, educational, professional, entertainment, and health-related—may increase engagement and effectiveness across gender groups.

Overall, the results emphasize that media literacy is not merely a technical skill but a complex cognitive and psychological construct shaped by developmental factors, emotional well-being, educational context, and individual motivation. For vocational education students, enhanced media literacy holds special importance: it supports their academic performance, professional identity formation, workplace readiness, and mental well-being. Therefore, integrative strategies are needed to promote critical thinking, self-regulation, and responsible media engagement. These may include structured media literacy courses, interactive workshops, digital ethics modules, and psychological support systems aimed at reducing stress and improving emotional resilience.

Conclusion

This study highlights the essential role of media literacy in shaping the academic, psychological, and professional development of vocational education students. The findings confirm that while students generally demonstrate moderate proficiency in basic digital skills, substantial gaps remain in their ability to critically analyze media content, identify misinformation, and regulate their own media consumption behaviors. These shortcomings are particularly concerning given the increasing integration of digital technologies in vocational training, workplace environments, and everyday communication. The research demonstrates that psychological characteristics—especially stress levels, emotional stability, and self-regulation capacity—play a decisive role in determining how students interact with media. Students with lower psychological resilience tend to rely on passive media use, which negatively affects academic performance and reduces cognitive engagement. Conversely, students with stronger self-regulation skills and clearer academic or career goals display more intentional and productive media usage patterns. These findings underscore the importance of incorporating psychological support mechanisms, stress management strategies, and self-regulation training into media literacy programs.

Age-based differences further suggest that media literacy education must be dynamic and developmentally informed. Younger students tend to rely heavily on social media platforms for information, making them more vulnerable to misinformation and superficial content. Older students, with greater cognitive maturity and vocational focus, show more balanced media habits. This developmental progression indicates that early and continuous media literacy education is necessary to ensure students acquire the skills needed for responsible media navigation. The absence of significant gender differences in overall media literacy levels reveals that media literacy challenges are universal across student populations. Thus, interventions should focus not on demographic stratification, but on enhancing fundamental cognitive competencies, critical thinking, and digital awareness for all learners.

Taken together, the findings emphasize that media literacy should be recognized as a core component of vocational education, not an optional or supplementary skill. Integrating media literacy training into curricula can provide students with tools to critically engage with information, make informed decisions, and maintain psychological well-being in an increasingly digitized society. Effective strategies may include structured coursework, interactive digital

modules, project-based learning, mentorship programs, and collaboration with mental health professionals. In conclusion, enhancing media literacy among vocational education students is essential for cultivating competent, resilient, and digitally responsible future professionals. By adopting comprehensive, psychologically informed, and developmentally appropriate educational approaches, vocational institutions can significantly strengthen students' critical thinking, digital competencies, and lifelong learning capacities—ultimately contributing to their academic achievement, career readiness, and overall personal growth.

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