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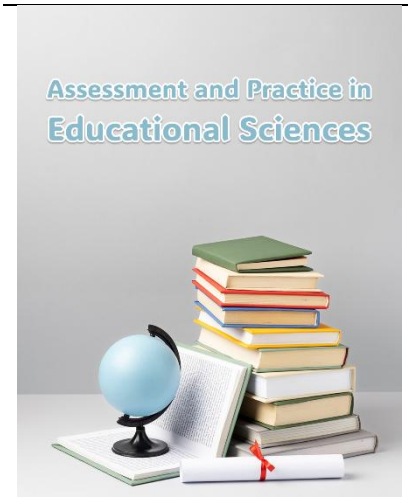

Teaching–Learning Methods of Media Literacy Education for Farhangian University Students

ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to identify and explain the teaching–learning methods of the media literacy education curriculum for students of Farhangian University. This study was conducted using a conventional qualitative research design. In the qualitative phase, conventional qualitative content analysis was employed to analyze semi-structured interviews and scholarly texts. The statistical population consisted of experts in the field of media literacy and teacher education, who were selected through purposive sampling. Data analysis led to the extraction of 17 concepts, 4 subcategories, and 2 main categories, including “theoretical and practical methods” and “cognitive methods.” The findings also indicated the high validity and importance of these methods in improving the process of media literacy education. In line with previous findings, the results suggest that curriculum planners and teacher educators should use a combination of theoretical, practical, cognitive, and participatory methods in media literacy education to provide a deeper, more critical, and more sustainable learning experience for students.

Keywords: Media literacy, teaching–learning methods, media, education

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Introduction

In an era marked by the omnipresence of digital technologies and mass communication networks, the imperative for fostering media literacy has become increasingly pronounced across educational systems worldwide. Media literacy encompasses the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media in a variety of forms, equipping individuals with the

critical faculties necessary to navigate complex information ecosystems and actively participate in democratic societies (1, 2). The accelerating digital transformation and the rise of algorithmically curated content have fundamentally altered the dynamics of information production and consumption, making it essential for educational institutions to prepare future teachers who can cultivate critical and reflective media users among their students (3, 4).

The significance of media literacy in teacher education has gained momentum as evidence grows regarding its role in enhancing students' civic engagement, digital citizenship, and resilience to misinformation (5, 6). According to recent global guidelines, media literacy education is no longer a peripheral competency but a core dimension of 21st-century education policy frameworks (1). However, despite this international consensus, empirical investigations indicate that teacher education programs in several contexts remain inadequately equipped to integrate media literacy systematically into their curricula (7, 8). This gap is especially concerning in contexts such as Farhangian University, which serves as the primary institution for training pre-service teachers in Iran, where curricular structures have traditionally prioritized disciplinary content over transversal competencies like media literacy (9).

Research has consistently highlighted the transformative potential of media literacy education for promoting critical thinking, reflective judgment, and ethical participation in digital environments (10, 11). For instance, incorporating personal storytelling as a pedagogical strategy has been shown to enhance both emotional engagement and cognitive processing in students, fostering deeper connections with media content and more nuanced interpretive skills (10). Similarly, the integration of project-based and collaborative media production activities has been associated with improvements in students' problem-solving abilities, communication skills, and cultural awareness (4, 5). These findings underscore the need to equip teacher candidates with not only theoretical knowledge about media systems but also hands-on competencies in designing and facilitating media literacy learning experiences (12).

Nevertheless, current research also points to substantial challenges in operationalizing media literacy within teacher education programs. One key obstacle is the conceptual ambiguity surrounding media literacy, which has led to fragmented and inconsistent curricular implementations (3, 13). Another barrier concerns the limited professional development opportunities available to teacher educators themselves, which restricts their capacity to model and scaffold media literacy practices effectively (14). In many cases, teacher educators report a lack of clear standards, assessment frameworks, and instructional resources to support systematic media literacy instruction (7). Furthermore, contextual studies have revealed that student teachers often exhibit low baseline levels of media literacy, underscoring the need for explicit and structured pedagogical interventions within teacher training programs (8, 9).

The urgency of addressing these gaps is amplified by the evolving technological landscape, which has introduced new ethical, cognitive, and socio-cultural complexities into the media environment. Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence-driven content generation blur the boundaries between authentic and synthetic information, challenging traditional epistemic assumptions (15). Likewise, the pervasive data collection practices underlying digital platforms have raised concerns about surveillance capitalism and its implications for privacy, autonomy, and democratic participation (16). As immersive virtual environments like the Metaverse gain prominence, learners increasingly encounter hybrid realities where virtual and physical experiences intersect, necessitating advanced media literacy skills to navigate these new socio-technological terrains (17). Teacher education programs must therefore adopt forward-looking approaches that prepare future educators to critically engage with these emergent media ecologies and guide their students in doing the same (18, 19).

Moreover, media literacy education is deeply intertwined with cultural identity formation and intercultural competence. In an increasingly globalized media landscape, students are exposed to diverse cultural narratives that can both enrich and challenge their sense of self (13). Media literacy equips learners with the critical tools to negotiate these cultural encounters,

enabling them to preserve local cultural heritage while engaging constructively with global discourses (4, 11). This cultural dimension is especially salient in multicultural educational contexts, where media can either reinforce cultural marginalization or serve as a platform for cultural empowerment (20, 21). As such, teacher education programs must address not only the technical and critical aspects of media literacy but also its role in fostering inclusive and culturally responsive pedagogies (22).

Recent scholarship also underscores the importance of aligning media literacy education with broader educational innovation and curriculum reform initiatives. For example, research on curriculum design emphasizes the value of scenario-based planning and futures thinking in developing adaptive, forward-compatible teacher education models (23). Similarly, studies in related educational domains illustrate how conceptual frameworks—such as those developed for environmental education or virtual instruction—can inform the systematic integration of cross-disciplinary competencies like media literacy into higher education curricula (19, 21, 24). Furthermore, the incorporation of interactive and multimodal learning media has been identified as a powerful strategy for fostering engagement and literacy skills among learners, offering insights that can be transferred to media literacy pedagogy (22). These developments point to the need for a coherent and research-informed framework for media literacy education in teacher preparation programs.

In this context, the present study responds to the critical need for a comprehensive examination of teaching–learning methods for media literacy education in teacher training institutions, with a focus on Farhangian University.

Methods and Materials

This study employed a conventional qualitative content analysis design to identify and explain the teaching–learning methods used in the media literacy education curriculum for student teachers at Farhangian University. The study was conducted in Tehran, where the target population comprised experts in the fields of media literacy and teacher education. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure their specialized knowledge and direct experience with curriculum design and instructional methods for media literacy. Inclusion criteria required participants to have at least five years of professional experience in teaching, research, or curriculum planning in teacher education, as well as prior involvement in projects or publications related to media literacy education. The sample included university faculty members, curriculum specialists, and experienced teacher educators. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all individuals prior to data collection.

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews and document analysis of relevant scholarly texts and curriculum guidelines. The interview protocol was designed based on the main research question, which sought to identify and categorize the teaching–learning methods used in media literacy education. The questions were open-ended to encourage participants to elaborate on their experiences and perceptions. Interviews lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and were conducted either face-to-face or via secure online platforms. All interviews were audio-recorded with permission and then transcribed verbatim for analysis. Additionally, scientific and educational documents, including curriculum syllabi, policy reports, and academic articles related to media literacy, were examined to supplement and triangulate the interview data.

The collected data were analyzed using the conventional qualitative content analysis method. Analysis was performed simultaneously with data collection to allow for iterative refinement of codes and categories. Initially, the interview transcripts and textual data were read multiple times to gain a comprehensive understanding. Then, meaning units were extracted and coded inductively without imposing preconceived categories. These codes were grouped based on conceptual similarities into subcategories, and subsequently, broader categories were formed to represent higher-level themes. To enhance credibility, peer debriefing was conducted with two external experts in media literacy education, and member checking was performed by sharing preliminary findings with several participants for confirmation. Dependability was ensured by maintaining a detailed

audit trail of analytical decisions, and confirmability was strengthened through continuous reflexive documentation of the researchers' assumptions and potential biases throughout the analysis process.

Findings and Results

Based on Table 1, the teaching–learning methods of the media literacy curriculum include two main categories: theoretical and practical methods, and cognitive methods. The theoretical and practical methods themselves comprise two subcategories: theoretical methods and practical methods. The subcategory of theoretical methods includes the concepts of theoretical learning, critical method, and discussion and debate method.

Table 1. Concepts, Subcategories, and Categories in Response to the Question on Teaching–Learning Methods of the Media Literacy Curriculum

Main Categories	Subcategories	Concepts	Row
Theoretical and Practical Methods	Theoretical Methods	Theoretical Learning (6, 12, 15, and 17)	1
		Critical Method (2 and 7)	2
		Discussion and Debate Method (4, 5, 8, and Q5)	3
	Practical Methods	Experiential Method (1, 3, and 14)	4
		Inquiry and Exploration (2 and 13)	5
		Apprenticeship (8, 11, and 13)	6
		Workshop Method (3, 8, 9, 10, 11, 15, 16, and 17)	7
		Scientific Projects (4, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 16)	8
		Lesson Study (9 and 12)	9
		Demonstration Method (8, 9, and 12)	10
		Conference Method (8, 9, and 11)	11
		Electronic and Internet-Based Method (3, 7, and 14)	12
Cognitive Methods	Cognitive Methods	Problem-Solving (4, 8, 9, 12, and 13)	13
		Study Skills (2, 5, 6, and 15)	14
		Indirect Teaching (8 and 13)	15
	Combined Methods	Integrated Method (4, 5, 9, and Q11)	16
		Group Method (8, 10, and 16)	17

Theoretical Learning: Participant No. 15 stated: "The teaching–learning methods in the media literacy education curriculum include theoretical and practical methods. In the theoretical method, theoretical content is directly taught. This method is more suitable for parts of the content that are theoretical information, and it should be used for this type of content."

Critical Method: Participant No. 2 explained: "Acquiring the skills necessary for critically viewing media and fostering critical thinking in students involves analyzing and questioning the framework of the message and its omitted aspects. In fact, through these skills, students can uncover meanings beyond what the sender intended and construct a completely personal and individual interpretation of the message."

Discussion and Debate Method: Participant No. 8 stated: "Another method that can be used is the discussion and debate method. This is particularly important in identifying the content of messages, which is highly interpretive. Therefore, student teachers should be trained in the correct way of conducting discussions and debates so they can teach this in their own classes."

The second subcategory of the theoretical and practical methods is practical methods, which include the concepts of experiential method, inquiry and exploration, apprenticeship, workshop method, scientific projects, lesson study, demonstration method, conference method, and electronic and internet-based method.

Experiential Method: Participant No. 1 stated: "To learn media literacy, one must use John Dewey's educational method, which is the experiential method. This means teaching various types of software and messaging platforms, bringing political press clippings and teaching their techniques to attract audiences. Why is a text written in bold at the beginning of an article,

or why are some topics never mentioned, or why does each newspaper emphasize a different part of the same text? We must use the experiential method and assign tasks accordingly."

Inquiry and Exploration: Participant No. 13 stated: "Another method was conducting sessions in the form of inquiry circles, which ultimately led to individual exploration and inquiry, diversity in covered topics, and active participation of students."

Apprenticeship: Participant No. 11 stated: "These teaching–learning methods should lead to guidance and facilitation in teaching. Various methods can be used in this regard, including conference, apprenticeship, project-based, and workshop methods. Particularly, the role of the apprenticeship method can be highlighted here."

Workshop Method: Participant No. 3 stated: "In my opinion, if we teach media literacy according to individual needs, it will be much more effective, because the use of electronic tools brings us into a borderless world. In learning this media literacy, various methods can be used. In one method, the individual can learn the required training through the internet; in another method, to monitor the learning process, we can use the workshop method."

Scientific Projects: Participant No. 10 stated: "To achieve educational goals in teaching and training, one single method cannot be effective and productive. Rather, combining several methods can help us reach the educational goals in this field. These include project-based, workshop, and other methods."

Lesson Study: Participant No. 12 stated: "The most important teaching–learning method we must adopt is practical. Explanatory and theoretical methods are not sufficient. Nowadays, we must use practical and workshop methods. The methods should be based on group and individual training. We can also use lesson study methods. The problem-solving method is also an effective method."

Demonstration Method: Participant No. 9 stated: "Another teaching–learning method in this field is the demonstration method. The content to be taught is presented through performances and films. This method is very effective and efficient for individuals who are interested in such things."

Conference Method: Participant No. 8 stated: "One of the teaching–learning methods used at Farhangian University is the conference method. This method is used for many subjects. For teaching media literacy to student teachers, this method can also be used in appropriate situations, especially for teaching media literacy."

Electronic and Internet-Based Method: Participant No. 14 stated: "Another method is using electronic and internet-based methods. Considering the current software movement, using the internet and electronic methods is inevitable. For media literacy, these methods can also be used to teach student teachers."

The second main category is cognitive methods, which include the subcategories of cognitive methods and combined methods. The subcategory of cognitive methods includes the concepts of problem-solving, study skills, and indirect teaching.

Problem-Solving: Participant No. 4 stated: "We can use methods that are based on information and communication technology. We can use scientific projects or the problem-solving method. Teaching–learning methods also include teachers' instructional methods."

Study Skills: Participant No. 5 stated: "Another method for teaching–learning is the use of study skills. By teaching study skills to student teachers, they can read and learn the relevant texts themselves. Even student teachers can teach these methods to their students to use in their own learning."

Indirect Teaching: Participant No. 13 stated: "Another method that can be used is the indirect teaching method. In indirect teaching, concepts can be taught through films, performances, literary texts, poetry, and so on. We must see how we can use this method in teaching media literacy to student teachers."

The second subcategory of cognitive methods is combined methods, which include the concepts of integrated method and group method.

Integrated Method: Participant No. 5 stated: "In teaching–learning media literacy, integrated methods can also be used. Integrated methods mean using a combination of methods. In fact, this method even seems more effective. Depending on the type of content to be taught, the appropriate method should be selected."

Group Method: Participant No. 16 stated: "Another method is the group method. In many cases, group methods can be used for teaching–learning. In teaching media literacy as well, some content can be taught using the group method."

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to identify and explain the teaching–learning methods most suitable for embedding media literacy education within the curriculum of Farhangian University, which is responsible for preparing future teachers in Iran. Analysis of semi-structured interviews and relevant scholarly texts led to the emergence of two main categories of teaching–learning methods—"theoretical and practical methods" and "cognitive methods"—encompassing 17 specific instructional approaches. This multifaceted structure underscores that cultivating media literacy among student teachers requires an integrative pedagogical framework combining conceptual knowledge, experiential learning, reflective cognition, and collaborative practices. The findings align with international literature asserting that no single teaching method can sufficiently develop the complex skills media literacy entails; rather, an array of complementary pedagogies is required to promote deep, critical, and sustainable learning (1, 2, 7).

The first major category, theoretical and practical methods, encapsulates two subcategories: theoretical approaches such as theoretical learning, critical method, and discussion/debate method, and practical approaches such as experiential, inquiry-based, apprenticeship, workshop, project-based, lesson study, demonstration, conference, and digital/online methods. The emphasis placed by participants on theoretical learning reflects the necessity of providing student teachers with foundational conceptual frameworks to understand the nature, structures, and functions of media systems. This finding resonates with Potter's assertion that media literacy education should begin with explicit instruction in core concepts, including the symbolic construction of messages, the role of economic and ideological forces, and the impact of media on society (2). Providing student teachers with solid theoretical grounding ensures that subsequent practical applications are rooted in critical awareness rather than passive consumption (3).

Similarly, the prominence of critical and debate-based methods in the findings highlights the centrality of critical thinking as an anchor competence in media literacy. Participants emphasized training student teachers to question underlying assumptions, analyze implicit biases, and evaluate the credibility and intent of media messages—skills widely cited as essential for countering misinformation and cultivating active digital citizenship (5, 6). Prior research confirms that dialogic instructional strategies, such as structured debates and Socratic seminars, foster deeper analytical reasoning and increase learners' capacity to interpret media through multiple cultural and ideological lenses (11, 13). In line with Hobbs' work on personal storytelling, encouraging student teachers to articulate and interrogate their own media experiences during debates can enhance both cognitive engagement and emotional resonance, resulting in more profound learning outcomes (10).

The practical subcategory, which included methods such as experiential learning, inquiry, apprenticeship, workshops, and projects, points to the necessity of hands-on and participatory learning environments in media literacy education. Participants consistently stressed that student teachers must engage directly with media artifacts, tools, and production processes to internalize media literacy concepts. This finding echoes the constructivist perspective articulated by Buckingham, who argues that learners develop authentic media literacy competencies primarily through experiential production activities that demand

critical reflection on form, content, and audience (4). Similarly, project-based learning, which was frequently mentioned by participants, has been documented as a powerful catalyst for problem-solving, collaboration, and creativity in media education contexts (5). Apprenticeship and lesson study approaches, in which student teachers work alongside experienced mentors to design and deliver media literacy lessons, are also consistent with global best practices emphasizing collaborative professional learning communities in teacher education (7, 14).

Another noteworthy finding was the recurrent mention of digital and online methods as integral to effective media literacy instruction. Participants described how integrating e-learning platforms, interactive multimedia, and internet-based resources allows student teachers to access diverse perspectives and real-time media content. This aligns with UNESCO's global policy guidelines, which advocate leveraging digital technologies to foster flexible, accessible, and authentic media learning environments (1). Given the increasingly algorithmic and data-driven nature of media, this technological integration is not merely a delivery mechanism but a core dimension of media literacy itself (15, 16). By actively engaging student teachers in digital content creation and critique, these methods can also mitigate the passive consumption habits often observed among novice teachers (9).

The second main category, cognitive methods, included the subcategories of cognitive approaches (problem-solving, study skills, indirect teaching) and combined approaches (integrated and group methods). These approaches emphasize higher-order cognitive processes and metacognitive reflection, fostering the ability to independently analyze, evaluate, and synthesize media information. The inclusion of problem-solving approaches reflects the growing consensus that media literacy education should be framed as an inquiry-driven process where learners tackle authentic issues such as misinformation, algorithmic bias, and digital ethics (6, 17). Problem-based learning has been found to enhance learners' critical reasoning, decision-making, and adaptive expertise—skills that are indispensable for teachers operating in rapidly evolving media environments (12).

Study skills and indirect teaching methods also emerged as vital strategies, particularly for promoting autonomous learning. Participants described how training student teachers in structured reading strategies, note-taking, and media content analysis can equip them to continue developing their media literacy competencies independently. This is consistent with evidence that metacognitive regulation of media engagement fosters long-term retention and transfer of media literacy skills (3). Indirect teaching, through exposure to films, documentaries, and cultural texts without overt teacher direction, similarly cultivates interpretive agency and critical awareness, which are hallmarks of mature media literacy (11, 13).

The combined methods subcategory—which encompassed integrated and group methods—further underscores the value of blending diverse pedagogical approaches to accommodate varied learning preferences and content types. Participants emphasized that combining theoretical instruction with practical projects, debates with collaborative group tasks, and guided lessons with self-directed explorations enhances engagement and learning outcomes. This aligns with evidence that hybrid instructional designs increase learner motivation, social interaction, and critical thinking in media literacy contexts (14, 22). Group learning, in particular, supports the development of communication skills, empathy, and cultural sensitivity, which are increasingly recognized as essential affective dimensions of media literacy (20, 21). Such collaborative experiences also mirror the participatory culture of digital media environments, preparing student teachers to foster inclusive and democratic classroom communities (4).

Collectively, these findings affirm the necessity of adopting a multidimensional pedagogical framework for media literacy education in teacher training. The integration of theoretical, practical, cognitive, and collaborative methods not only addresses the diverse competencies encompassed by media literacy but also aligns with global calls for future-oriented and culturally responsive teacher education (1, 7, 13). Moreover, the findings echo recent scholarship advocating for scenario-based curriculum design to ensure that teacher education programs remain adaptive to emerging media technologies and socio-

cultural dynamics (19, 23, 24). By articulating a coherent repertoire of teaching–learning methods, this study contributes to the foundational knowledge base needed to transform media literacy from an ancillary topic into a central pillar of teacher education (8, 9).

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the sample was limited to experts and student teachers affiliated with Farhangian University in Tehran, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other teacher education institutions within or beyond Iran. Institutional cultures, curriculum structures, and policy priorities vary widely, and these contextual differences may influence the applicability of the identified teaching–learning methods. Second, the study relied primarily on qualitative data from interviews and document analysis. While this approach allowed for in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives, it did not capture quantitative measures of the effectiveness or learning outcomes associated with each method. Third, the study focused on identifying and categorizing teaching–learning methods rather than implementing and evaluating them in actual classroom contexts. Consequently, the practical feasibility, scalability, and impact of these methods remain to be empirically validated. Finally, the study may have been influenced by participants' self-reported biases and varying levels of familiarity with media literacy, which could have shaped their perceptions of certain methods' relevance or effectiveness.

Future research should build on these findings by conducting experimental or quasi-experimental studies that evaluate the effectiveness of the identified teaching–learning methods in improving student teachers' media literacy competencies. Such studies could use pre- and post-intervention assessments to examine gains in critical thinking, content analysis, media production skills, and digital citizenship behaviors. Longitudinal research would also be valuable to track the retention and transfer of media literacy skills from pre-service training into teachers' subsequent professional practice. Comparative studies across different teacher education institutions and cultural contexts could further illuminate how institutional and sociocultural variables shape the implementation and outcomes of media literacy pedagogies. Additionally, mixed-methods research combining qualitative and quantitative data could provide more comprehensive insights into both the processes and impacts of diverse instructional strategies. Future investigations might also explore how digital tools, immersive media, and AI-based learning environments can be leveraged to enhance media literacy instruction, given the rapid evolution of the media ecosystem.

From a practical perspective, teacher education institutions should consider embedding a structured media literacy component into their core curricula, drawing on the diverse teaching–learning methods identified in this study. Curriculum designers should ensure that theoretical instruction is integrated with hands-on projects, inquiry-based tasks, and collaborative group activities to foster both conceptual understanding and practical competencies. Professional development programs should be offered to equip teacher educators with the knowledge and skills to model and scaffold media literacy practices effectively. Institutions should also invest in digital infrastructure and resources to support interactive and authentic media learning experiences. Finally, fostering a culture of reflective practice and peer collaboration among student teachers can help sustain their engagement with media literacy beyond initial coursework, enabling them to integrate these competencies into their future classrooms and contribute to a more critically aware and media-savvy generation of learners.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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