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Formation of Media Literacy in Future Teachers of Preschool Organizations

Abstract

Introduction. The study addresses the problem of media literacy development among pre-service teachers of preschool education within the context of professional training. The relevance of the topic is driven by the growing role of the digital media environment in the lives of preschool-aged children and the insufficient preparedness of students to engage in media education activities. **Methodology and Methods.** A survey was conducted among 41 third-year students enrolled in the Preschool Education and Upbringing Programme at the University. The research instrument was a closed-ended questionnaire designed to diagnose students' perceptions of media literacy as a professional competency of a preschool teacher. **Results.** It was found that the majority of respondents generally recognize the professional significance of media literacy; however, they demonstrate reductive perceptions of its cognitive dimension and tend towards a restrictive model of media upbringing. A persistent conflation of the technical and cognitive components of media literacy was identified, along with insufficient readiness among students to conduct media literacy outreach work with families of pupils. **Scientific Novelty.** Empirical data have been obtained on pre-service preschool teachers' perceptions of media literacy as a professional competency within the contemporary information and media environment. **Practical Significance.** The findings of the study may be applied in designing the content of professional cycle disciplines, developing teaching placement programmes, and creating diagnostic instruments for assessing the media literacy of student teachers.

Keywords: media literacy, pre-service preschool teachers, professional training, digital competency, media upbringing.

Introduction. The rapid digitalization of all spheres of social life has necessitated the development of media literacy (Share, 2009) as a fundamental professional competency of educators, including within the preschool education system. The contemporary child becomes embedded in the media environment from an early age, which places fundamentally new demands on the professional readiness of preschool teachers to work in a digitally saturated environment. Media literacy represents an integrative personal competency that encompasses the ability to purposefully search for, critically analyze, and objectively evaluate information presented in various media formats, including textual, audiovisual,

digital, and multimedia forms, as well as the capacity to create original media content with an understanding of the mechanisms that shape the contemporary information and communication environment (Von Gillern et al., 2024). A media-literate individual (Yeleussiz & Qanay, 2025) is not a passive consumer of media products: they are capable of recognizing manipulative techniques of influence, verifying the credibility of sources, interpreting the implicit meanings of media messages, and consciously resisting information-related risks. Furthermore, media literacy presupposes the formation of an ethically responsible attitude towards the production and dissemination of information in the digital space, including

adherence to netiquette norms, respect for intellectual property rights, and awareness of the social consequences of media communication. In a broader sense, media literacy (Von Gillern et al., 2022) constitutes a necessary condition for the full and safe participation of the individual in the life of the information society, ensuring not only protection from destructive media influence but also the possibility of creative, critical, and responsible engagement with the media environment.

No single definition of media literacy has been established within the scholarly community that commands broad consensus. Nevertheless, several key researchers have made foundational contributions to the conceptualization of the subject. The definition formulated by Aufderheide (2018), following the National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy, is widely regarded as the starting point for most contemporary definitions. The researcher characterized media literacy as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate messages in a wide variety of forms. This formulation set the conceptual tone for the understanding of the subject among subsequent scholars (Christ & Potter, 1998; Hobbs & Jensen, 2016). A significant influence on the development of Western media education theory was exerted by the British scholar Masterman (2003). In his conceptual framework, the goal of media education was not limited to the development of critical thinking: the scholar insisted on the necessity of cultivating “critical autonomy” in the individual - that is, the capacity to independently and autonomously make sense of media messages (Masterman, 2003). A similar interpretation was proposed by Kubey (2001), who viewed media education as a tool for enabling students to understand how and why media function.

A substantial contribution to the development of media literacy theory was made by Hobbs (2010), who developed the AACRA model comprising five interrelated components: access, analysis, create, reflect, and act. Within this framework, media literacy is conceptualized as an expanded form of personal literacy that synthesizes the approaches of media literacy,

information literacy, visual literacy, and new literacies (Hobbs, 2010). Thus, despite the diversity of approaches, a general tendency can be observed in scholarly discourse towards understanding media literacy as an integrative competency that presupposes not only the reception of media messages but also the active and purposeful participation of the individual in the media environment. In the context of the professional training of pre-service preschool teachers, media literacy acquires a multilevel and multifunctional character, necessitating its examination through the lens of three interrelated dimensions of professional competency.

The personal dimension characterizes the internal, subjective plan of the teacher’s media literacy and presupposes the formation of a stable system of skills for perceiving media information. Within this dimension, particular significance attaches to the teacher’s capacity for conscious and reflective evaluation of media messages received through various communication channels - traditional mass media, digital platforms, social networks, and multimedia resources. A key aspect is the formation of analytical strategies for information verification: the ability to recognize manipulative techniques in the presentation of material, identify concealed ideological orientations in media texts, and differentiate credible content from disinformation and fabricated messages. Equally important is the development of a stable media hygiene in the teacher: a conscious and selective approach to media content consumption which directly influences the formation of professional values and worldview orientations. The personal dimension of media literacy serves not only a protective function with respect to the teachers themselves but also constitutes a necessary foundation for the realization of subsequent professional functions, since only a teacher possessing a well-developed media culture of their own is capable of purposefully and competently conducting media education activities with preschool children (Hobbs et al., 2018; Ramasubramanian et al., 2025).

The professional-didactic dimension reflects the operational plan of media literacy and reveals

the teacher's competency in the pedagogically grounded selection, adaptation, and application of media tools within the educational process with preschool-aged children. The substantive content of this dimension is determined by competency in selecting audiovisual content and digital educational resources that meet the age-related, psychophysiological, and individual characteristics of pupils: the teacher must be able to evaluate media materials in terms of their educational value, emotional safety, and compliance with sanitary and hygiene requirements governing the use of screen technologies in work with young and preschool-aged children. In addition, the professional-didactic dimension presupposes command of methods for integrating digital tools into the developmental educational environment of the preschool organization: designing media education situations, developing didactically grounded media-based materials, and organizing productive media activities for children in accordance with the principles of preschool didactics. An important place is occupied by the teacher's capacity for methodological reflection on the outcomes of media tool application and critical evaluation of their influence on the cognitive, speech, social-personal, and artistic-aesthetic development of pupils. The professional-didactic dimension of media literacy ensures an organic interconnection between the teacher's media competency and the specific objectives of the educational process in the kindergarten setting (Daneels & Vanwynsberghe, 2017).

The outreach dimension reveals the translational plane of media literacy, and characterizes the teacher's ability to purposefully cultivate the foundations of media literacy among the subjects of the educational process - both preschool-aged children and their parents. This dimension presupposes the implementation of media education activities in accessible and age-appropriate forms: through play-based situations, joint productive activities, organized discussions about the media environment and rules of safe behavior within it, and the gradual formation in pupils of elementary skills for distinguishing the real from the virtual and

understanding the constructed nature of media images. With respect to working with families, the outreach dimension entails equipping parents with knowledge about the risks of uncontrolled media consumption by children, strategies for family-based media upbringing, and methods of conscious shared use of digital resources. The realization of the outreach dimension requires the teacher not only well-formed communicative competencies but also a readiness to act as a subject of media-cultural education within the community, which corresponds to the expanded understanding of the professional role of the preschool teacher in the context of the digitalization of the social environment (Yeleussiz & Qanay, 2025).

Thus, the media literacy of a pre-service preschool teacher cannot be reduced to a set of discrete skills or a personal quality but rather constitutes an integrative, professionally significant competency structured around three mutually complementary dimensions. The unity of the personal, professional-didactic, and outreach dimensions determines the teacher's capacity to fulfil a threefold function: a protective function - shielding children from destructive media content; a developmental function - employing digital technologies as an instrument of the preschool child's personal and cognitive development; and a culture-forming function - laying the foundations of an individual's information culture from the earliest age. This understanding of media literacy is consistent with contemporary conceptions of professional pedagogical competency and responds to the strategic objectives of modernizing the preschool education system in the context of the digital transformation of society.

Materials and Methods. *Research design.* This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design. A survey-based approach was selected as the most appropriate method for diagnosing levels of media literacy awareness, perceptions, and professional attitudes among pre-service teachers within a clearly defined population. The cross-sectional design enabled the collection of empirical data at a single point in time, facilitating the identification of current patterns in respondents' understanding of media

literacy across three key dimensions: personal, professional-didactic, and outreach.

Participants. The study was conducted among pre-service preschool teachers enrolled at Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University (Almaty, Kazakhstan). The target population consisted of full-time third-year undergraduate students pursuing the 6B012 Preschool Education and Upbringing Programme. A total of 41 students participated in the study. Third-year students were deliberately selected for two reasons. First, by this stage of their Programme, they have completed the core professional disciplines of the curriculum. Second, they have accumulated direct experience through supervised teaching placement, which positions them to consciously and critically reflect on their readiness to integrate media literacy into professional practice. The sample was formed using a census method applied within several designated study groups, ensuring homogeneity of respondents in terms of level of training, Programme profile, and stage of professional preparation. No exclusion criteria were applied, as all students within the selected groups met the eligibility requirements.

Data collection instrument. A structured, standardized questionnaire was developed as the primary data collection instrument. The questionnaire comprised four closed-ended items, each offering four fixed response options (one correct and three distractors). The instrument was designed to measure three theoretically grounded dimensions of media literacy in pre-service preschool teachers:

- 1) Personal dimension - the respondent's individual media consumption habits and critical awareness of media content;
- 2) Professional-didactic dimension - knowledge and readiness to incorporate media literacy into educational activities with preschool-age children;
- 3) Outreach dimension - capacity to engage and communicate with parents and the broader community on issues of media literacy.

For each item, one response option reflected a professionally grounded, pedagogically sound position on media literacy, while the remaining three options represented typical misconceptions

or superficial understandings of the concept under investigation. This design allowed the researchers to diagnose not only respondents' correct knowledge but also the nature and pattern of their misconceptions. Content validity of the questionnaire was ensured through alignment of all items with the theoretical framework of the study. Before administration, the instrument was reviewed by subject-matter specialists in the field of preschool pedagogy and media education.

Data collection procedure. The survey was administered in a face-to-face, paper-based format under standard classroom conditions during regularly scheduled sessions. This format was chosen to ensure the independence of each respondent's answers and to preclude any possibility of mutual influence or consultation among participants during questionnaire completion. Participation was entirely voluntary and anonymous. Before the survey commenced, all participants were informed of the aims of the study, the confidentiality of all data collected, and their right to withdraw without consequence. Written information regarding these conditions was provided at the top of the questionnaire form. No identifying information was collected. Completion of the questionnaire required no more than 15 minutes.

Data analysis. Quantitative data obtained from the completed questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics. For each of the four items, the frequency and percentage distribution of responses across all four options were calculated. The proportion of respondents selecting the correct answer (the professionally grounded position) was used as the primary indicator of competence within each measured dimension of media literacy. Results were aggregated across dimensions to produce an overall profile of the cohort's media literacy awareness. Where relevant, patterns of incorrect response selection were examined to identify recurring misconceptions. Data were processed using Microsoft Excel. All results are reported as absolute frequencies and percentage shares of the total sample ($n=41$).

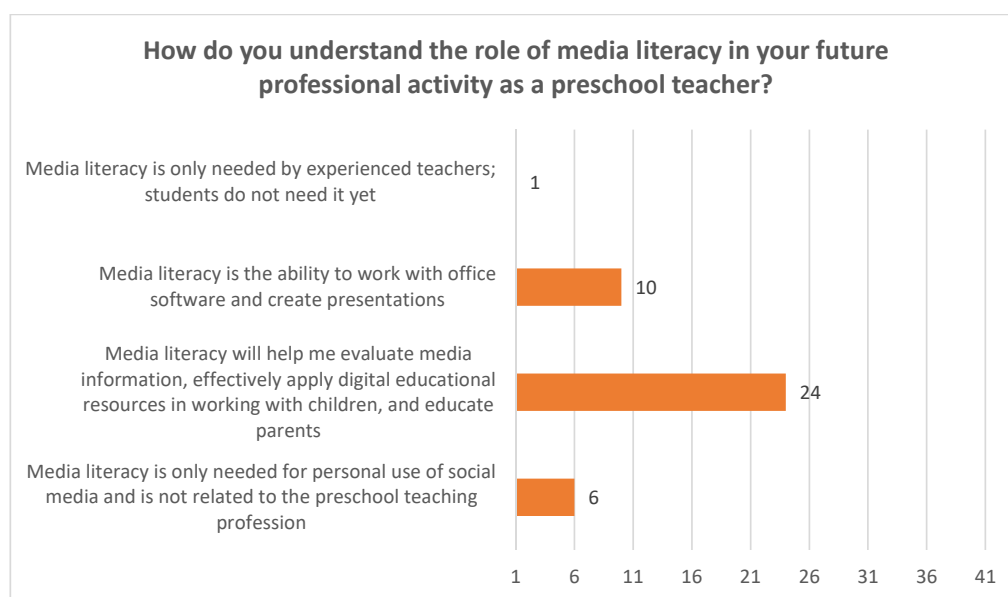
Results. The data obtained were subjected to quantitative processing: for each question,

the percentage of respondents selecting each response option was calculated. The results were analyzed (Figures 1–4) across the three identified dimensions of media literacy with the aim of determining the level of formation

of the corresponding perceptions among pre-service preschool teachers and identifying the most problematic aspects requiring targeted intervention within the framework of professional training.

Figure 1

Distribution of respondents' answers to the question on the role of media literacy in the professional activity of a preschool teacher (n=41)



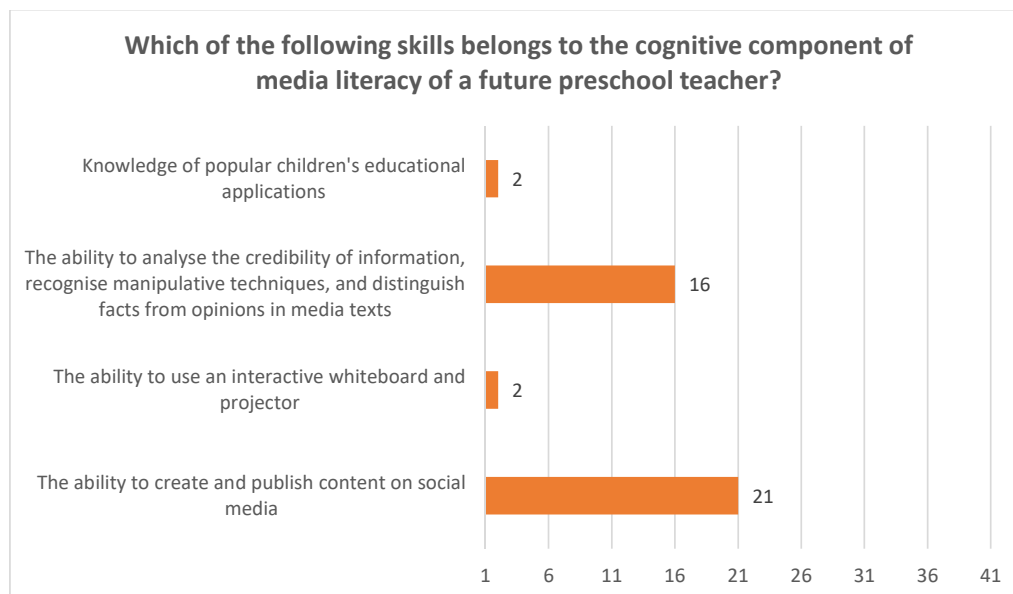
The survey results for the first question reveal heterogeneity in students' perceptions of the professional role of media literacy (Figure 1). The professionally grounded position - understanding media literacy as an instrument for evaluating media information, competently applying digital educational resources, and conducting outreach work with parents - was selected by 24 respondents, accounting for 58.5% of the sample. This considerable figure suggests that more than half of pre-service teachers recognize the multidimensional, professionally oriented nature of media literacy, which may be attributed to their completion of disciplines within the psychological-pedagogical cycle and their teaching placement experience.

At the same time, a substantial proportion of students demonstrated a reductive understanding of the phenomenon. Thus, 10 respondents (24.4%) equated media

literacy with proficiency in office software and presentation design skills, pointing to a persistent conflation of the concepts of "media literacy" and "digital literacy". This tendency is characteristic of students whose familiarity with digital technologies is largely confined to the use of application software for academic purposes. Six students (14.6%) regarded media literacy exclusively as a skill pertaining to the personal consumption of social media, failing to recognize its connection to professional activity, thereby reflecting an insufficient appreciation of the translational and outreach functions of the teacher in the contemporary information environment. Only one respondent (2.4%) held the view that media literacy is irrelevant for students, considering it necessary only for experienced teachers - a position that reflects an orientation towards deferred professional development.

Figure 2

Distribution of respondents' answers to the question on defining the cognitive component of media literacy of a preschool teacher (n=41)

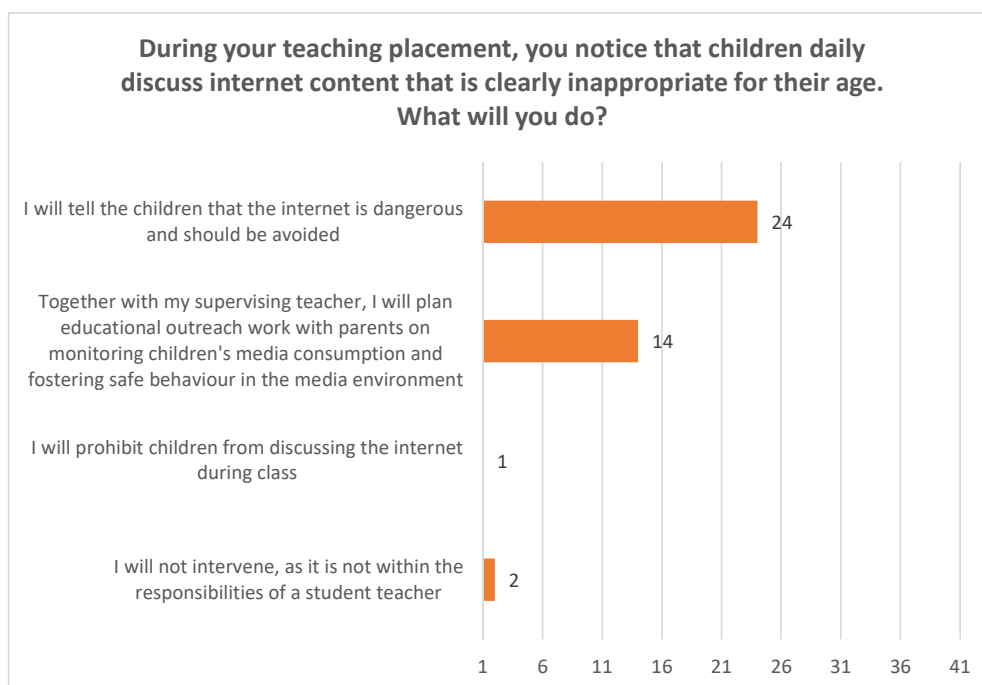


The responses to the second question reveal the most pronounced problem area in students' perceptions of the structure of media literacy (Figure 2). The correct answer - the ability to analyse the credibility of information, recognize manipulative techniques, and distinguish facts from opinions in media texts - was selected by only 16 respondents (39.0%), representing less than half of the sample. The majority of students - 21 persons (51.2%) - erroneously attributed to the cognitive component of media literacy the ability to create and publish content on social media. This result appears consistent with the prevalence of social media in the everyday lives of young people: students who actively

create user-generated content tend to perceive this skill as the central element of media competency, without differentiating between the technical and cognitive levels of media literacy. An insufficient formation of theoretical understanding of the structural components of media literacy according to the classification proposed by R. Hobbs and other researchers is clearly discernible. Two respondents each (4.9% respectively) indicated options related to the use of an interactive whiteboard and knowledge of children's educational applications, reflecting an instrumental-technological interpretation of media literacy.

Figure 3

Distribution of respondents' answers to the situational question on responding to age-inappropriate media content among children during teaching placement (n=41)

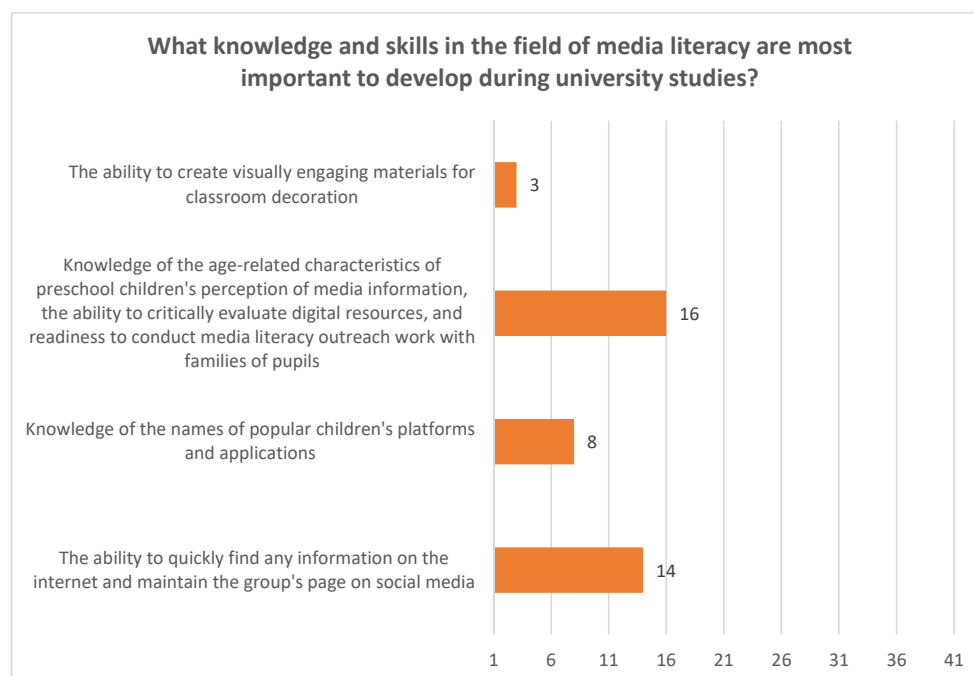


The responses to the third question reveal the most pronounced divergence between the professionally grounded position and the actual attitudes of students (Figure 3). The correct answer - jointly planning with the supervising teacher an outreach Programme for parents on monitoring children's media consumption and fostering safe behavior in the media environment - was selected by only 14 respondents (34.1%). The predominant response was option D - informing children of the dangers of the internet and the need to avoid it - chosen by 24 students (58.5%). This remarkably high figure is of particular interpretive interest: it indicates that the majority of pre-service teachers tend towards a restrictive model of media upbringing, grounded in prohibition and deterrence rather than in the formation of critical engagement with media information. Such an orientation

is attributable both to public discourses about internet threats that circulate widely in the media environment and to insufficient professional preparation in the field of media education technologies. It is important to emphasize that the strategy favored by the students contradicts the principles of media education, which presupposes not the isolation of the child from the media environment but rather the formation of skills for conscious navigation within it. Two students (4.9%) adopted a position of non-intervention, citing the limited authority of a student teacher - reflecting a passive professional stance in a situation that demands a pedagogical response. Only one respondent (2.4%) opted for prohibiting discussion of the internet during class - a response reflecting a restrictive yet less categorical strategy.

Figure 4

Distribution of respondents' answers to the question on priority knowledge and skills in the field of media literacy to be developed during university studies (n=41)



The responses to the fourth question reflect an instability in students' perceptions of the content of professional training in the field of media literacy. The professionally grounded answer - knowledge of the age-related characteristics of preschool children's perception of media information, the ability to critically evaluate digital resources, and readiness to conduct media literacy outreach work with families of pupils - was selected by 16 students (39.0%), which, while representing the largest share among all response options, nonetheless falls short of an absolute majority. Fourteen students (34.1%) favored the option associated with the ability to quickly find information on the internet and maintain the group's page on social media. This choice allows one to conclude that a considerable proportion of students reduce the professional media literacy of a teacher to the level of user skills characteristic of a non-professional audience - a tendency attributable both to an absence of clear understanding of the specifics of pedagogical media literacy and to the influence of everyday experience with digital platforms. Eight students (19.5%) identified knowledge of popular children's platforms

and applications as the priority, reflecting an instrumental-technological orientation in the understanding of professional training that is devoid of a reflexive-critical dimension. Three students (7.3%) highlighted the creation of visual materials for classroom decoration, pointing to an equation of media literacy with the decorative and design-related activities of the teacher.

Discussion. The findings of the survey open avenues for a meaningful examination of the identified tendencies in the context of current international research on teacher media literacy. The finding that 58.5% of respondents generally recognize the professionally oriented nature of media literacy is consistent with the conclusions of Lähdesmäki and Maunula (2023), who, through qualitative analysis of opinion pieces produced by 37 student teachers at a Finnish university, established that pre-service teachers broadly identify media literacy as a significant competency necessary for fostering children's safe and responsible relationship with the media environment. The authors emphasize, however, that awareness of the significance of media literacy does not in itself guarantee readiness for

its practical implementation in the educational process - a disparity clearly discernible in the responses of the Kazakhstani students: despite their declared understanding of the professional role of media literacy, only 34.1% demonstrated the capacity for professionally grounded behavior in a concrete pedagogical situation (Question 3).

Particular attention is warranted by the tendency identified in the analysis of responses to the second question towards a conflation of the cognitive and technical dimensions of media literacy: 51.2% of students erroneously attributed to the cognitive component the ability to create and publish content on social media. This contradiction resonates with the concerns raised by Simons (2017) in a study devoted to the development of an instrument for measuring teachers' media competency: the author demonstrates convincingly that teachers frequently exhibit considerable discrepancies between individual components of media competency, particularly between technical literacy and the capacity for critical analysis of media content. The results of a factor analysis conducted on a sample of 454 teachers and 219 student teachers confirm the multidimensional nature of media competency and the necessity of its operationalization through a system of differentiated indicators.

Equally instructive are the results of the third question, according to which 58.5% of students adopted a restrictive strategy in responding to age-inappropriate media content, preferring to appeal to the dangers of the internet as such. Such an orientation stands in direct contradiction to the conceptual foundations of media education as consistently developed in the work of Hobbs and Tuzel (2017): examining the digital learning motivation profiles of 2,820 Turkish educators, the authors establish that teachers oriented towards the development of students' critical thinking demonstrate a markedly different professional stance, one of conscious navigation within the media environment rather than isolation from it. The predominance of the restrictive model in the responses of students at the Kazakhstani university may be explained by the absence of specialized courses from

curricula that cultivate an understanding of media education as a positive developmental practice rather than a protective and restrictive measure.

In this regard, the question of the organizational forms through which media literacy is incorporated into teacher professional training is of considerable importance. Meehan et al. (2015) make a compelling case that the introduction of a standalone media literacy course within teacher education programmes is not always organizationally feasible; however, media literacy can be effectively integrated into existing disciplines as a cross-cutting pedagogical strategy. The authors emphasize the necessity of cultivating in pre-service teachers the habit of examining sources, reflecting on their own assumptions, and becoming aware of their own media habits as foundational professional competencies. It is precisely the absence of this reflexive dimension that is evident among the 61.0% of respondents who did not select the professionally grounded answer to the fourth question: the predominance of instrumental-technological priorities over reflexive-critical ones indicates that media literacy has not been integrated into a coherent professional worldview among a substantial proportion of students.

The totality of the results examined allows for the formulation of several conclusions of significance for the improvement of professional training for preschool teachers in Kazakhstan. First, a clear differentiation of the technical, cognitive, and outreach components of media literacy within curricula is required - as proposed in the instrument developed by Simons (2017). Second, professional training must encompass not only theoretical familiarization with the concept of media literacy but also the practical rehearsal of professional response scenarios in situations involving children's and parents' media consumption, in accordance with the principle of shared educational responsibility between school and family as substantiated by Lähdesmäki and Maunula (2023). Third, drawing on the conclusions of Hobbs and Tuzel (2017) regarding the significance of teachers' motivational profiles, professional training

programmes should provide for the diagnosis of students' attitudes towards media education and targeted work to overcome restrictive stereotypes that impede the realization of the developmental potential of the media environment in the education of preschool-aged children.

Conclusion. The problem of developing media literacy among pre-service preschool teachers is gaining increasing relevance in the context of the rapid digitalization of the developmental environment and the pervasive involvement of preschool-aged children in the media space. Analysis of the responses of 41 students revealed a contradiction that characterizes the current state of professional training in the field under investigation: the declarative recognition of the significance of media literacy among the majority of respondents is not supported by an operational readiness for its practical implementation.

A considerable proportion of pre-service teachers equate professional media competency with user-level digital skills, failing to recognize its critical-analytical and outreach potential. Equally concerning is the predominance of a restrictive model of media upbringing, in which the pedagogical response to media-related

risks is reduced to prohibition and deterrence rather than the formation in children of skills for conscious and safe navigation of the media environment. The identified problems cannot be resolved through isolated instructional activities and require a purposeful revision of the content of professional training for preschool educators. In this regard, it is reasonable to put forward several recommendations aimed at improving the media literacy preparation of pre-service preschool teachers. Curricula for the 6B012 Programme should provide for a consistent differentiation of the technical, cognitive, and outreach components of media literacy, ensuring the formation in students of a coherent professional understanding of the phenomenon. The theoretical acquisition of the conceptual framework of media education must be combined with practice-oriented tasks that simulate real pedagogical situations involving children's media consumption and interaction with families of pupils. The prospects for further research lie in broadening the sample to include students across different years of study and pedagogical programs, as well as in the development and pilot testing of media literacy formation programs for preschool teachers with subsequent evaluation of their effectiveness.

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