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Austrian Teachers' Perspectives on Media Literacy

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Teachers' perspectives on media literacy and education play a significant role in cultivating students' media literacy. The study examines Austrian teachers' attitudes and views on media literacy and education. A pre-survey of teachers who participated in teacher trainings in digital basic education ("Digitale Grundbildung") reveals that teachers have a positive view on media literacy, leaning toward a protectionist and instrumental approach rather than a critical one. Although critical thinking is included in their perspective, ideology critique and the issue of power are completely overlooked.

Die Sichtweisen von Lehrkräften auf Medienkompetenz und Bildung sind entscheidend für die Förderung der Medienkompetenz von Schülerinnen und Schülern. In der Studie werden die Einstellungen und Ansichten österreichischer Lehrkräfte zu Medienkompetenz und Bildung untersucht. Eine Vorabumfrage unter Lehrkräften, die an Lehrerfortbildungen zur digitalen Grundbildung teilgenommen haben, zeigt, dass Lehrkräfte der Medienkompetenz positiv gegenüberstehen und eher einen protektionistischen und instrumentellen als einen kritischen Ansatz verfolgen. Obwohl kritisches Denken Teil ihrer Perspektive ist, lassen sie Ideologiekritik und die Frage der Macht völlig außer Acht.

1. Introduction

Media literacy education begins with teachers (Butler 2019). In fact, developing students' media literacy through the school curriculum and lessons requires teachers who are critical media literate as "teachers cannot teach what they have not learned" (Goetze et al. 2005: 161).

To develop media literacy throughout the education system, teachers require to be equipped with a framework and pedagogy that enable them to guide their students in questioning and critically analyzing different types of messages in their everyday lives as well as in producing alternative media texts (Kellner/Share 2019). Understanding teachers' views and attitudes toward media literacy is crucial to cultivating critical media literacy among them. It is indeed a starting point for integrating critical media literacy into teacher training programs, influencing the development of

critical media literacy among students throughout the education system.

In 2023, Austria began systematically integrating media education into teacher training programs, along with implementing digital basic education ("Digitale Grundbildung") as a compulsory subject in lower secondary school curricula, effective September 2023. Consequently, numerous teacher training programs at universities and university colleges for teacher education (Pädagogische Hochschule) have started offering courses, further education, and training for in-service and pre-service teachers under the title "Digitale Grundbildung" (digital basic education).

However, a review of the literature reveals that little is known about teachers' perspectives on media literacy in Austria. Given this lack of knowledge and research, this study aims to explore teachers' perspectives on media literacy in Austria, acknowledging the critical role teachers' views play in implementing media literacy in school curricula. This study will contribute to the development and improvement of media literacy education for teachers.

2. Approaches to Media Literacy

There are different perspectives on media literacy, which are classified differently. Here, we consider five approaches mainly based on Buckingham (2019) and Kellner and Share (2005, 2007). The *instrumental* or *technical* approach is one of the mainstream approaches. It views media literacy as only teaching and learning with media and technical skills to maximize the benefits of using

media without a critical understanding of its social, economic, and political implications (Buckingham 2019).

In this approach, media and technology are merely tools used to improve learning and deliver school subjects (Buckingham 2019), a notion that is challenged by many scholars (Buckingham 2019; Kellner/Share 2019). Another aspect of this perspective is teaching problem solving, coding, and computer programming to prepare students for jobs in the digital economy (Buckingham 2018, 2019). Some even equate citizenship with the ability to use technology to access services such as online banking, e-government, and e-commerce (Ferrari 2013).

Another common perspective is the *protectionist* or *defensive* approach, which arises from a fear of media that seeks to protect individuals from the dangers of media manipulation and addiction (Share 2009). From this standpoint, media significantly contributes to various social problems, especially among children and young people. When violence, sexualization, obesity, drug use, consumerism, or nearly any other societal issue escalates, media are often blamed as the primary cause.

Consequently, the central component of media education in this approach is teaching children to stay safe online, protect their privacy, avoid inappropriate content, and recognize fake news to reduce the harmful influence of media. From this perspective, media literacy is primarily seen as a form of self-protection or self-regulation (Buckingham 2019). By isolating media from its broader social, cultural, and economic context, the approach

oversimplifies social problems and sees media literacy as an individualistic solution to a wider set of social issues (Buckingham 2019; Kellner/Share 2007). Furthermore, the efficacy of this perspective on children's behaviour is being questioned, and it may even be counterproductive (Buckingham 2019).

Media arts education (Kellner/Share 2007) or *creativity* (Buckingham 2019) is the next approach. This approach emphasizes the use of creativity for self-expression through the creation of art and media, yet it lacks a critical examination of oppressive structures and alternative media production (Kellner/Share 2009). Buckingham (2019) argues that this approach does not accurately define the meaning of creativity and views creativity as inherently positive, regardless of the content produced or its intended purpose.

Media literacy movement is another approach to media literacy. From this standpoint,

media literacy is understood to comprise a set of communication competencies, which include the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate (The Alliance for a Media Literate America, in: Kellner/Share 2007).

This approach has found its way into many schools and educational systems because it claims to be apolitical and neutral by avoiding ideology critique and the issue of power. While the omission and overlooking of power, bias, and ideologies in media representation has facilitated the adoption of this approach in educational systems across many nations, it also undermines the

transformative potential of media education to become a powerful means of challenging oppression and reinforcing democracy (Kellner/Share 2007).

The last approach is the *Critical* approach. Many scholars in the realm of media education claim that their perspective on media literacy is "critical"; however, the term "critical" is not clearly defined in their viewpoints. The three strands of the critical approach that clearly delineate the meaning of criticality in their theories are discussed below.

Kellner and Share (2019) define

critical as an aspect of a dialectical, sociocultural, and analytical process. [...] critical thinking that is more than just a cognitive idea; it is also a sociocultural understanding that seeks to develop in students a social consciousness as well as a working knowledge of how media operate (p. 19).

Critical media literacy from this approach has six core concepts (Funk et al. 2016; Kellner/Share 2019) and its goal is

to engage with media through critically examining representations, systems, structures, ideologies, and power dynamics that shape and reproduce culture and society (Share 2022: 131).

The politics of representation and the questioning of power, bias and ideologies (e.g., sexism, racism, classism, homophobia, to name a few) in media are central concerns (Hammer 2009) and make media literacy critical.

In Buckingham's (2019) view critical thinking is a *reflexive* process which

demands in-depth knowledge, rigorous analysis and careful study; it requires us to reflect on our personal uses of the media, and our emotional and symbolic investments in them; and it entails a broader awareness of how media relate to more general social, cultural, politic and historical development (Buckingham 2019: 41).

According to Buckingham (2003), critical thinking in media education has four conceptual understandings and the process of critical understanding of media culture and power

requires a dynamic relationship between practice and theory, between action and reflection, and between creativity and critique (Buckingham 2018:10).

Although in Buckingham's theory of media education, critique of ideology is a component of critical thinking, unlike Kellner and Share, he distances himself from considering ideology critique as criticality in media education. He argues that the primary focus of critical thinking in media education should be on economics, politics, ideology, representation, and social justice, while also incorporating aesthetics, pleasure, and fantasy (Buckingham 2019, 2022).

Another strand in critical approach is the media competence theory proposed by Dieter Baacke, which is commonly applied in German-speaking regions. Baacke identifies four components of media competence: media criticism, media studies, media usage, and media design (Swertz 2012). Media criticism focuses on un-

derstanding social processes, including aspects such as media ownership. It also addresses ethical considerations related to the responsible use of media to avoid harming others. From his viewpoint, media criticism requires a reflexive approach that encourages societal participation and enables emancipated reflection on society (Swertz 2012).

Despite the differences in the critical dimensions of media literacy among the strands in critical approach, they all emphasize the importance of media creation and taking action as essential components of media literacy. The goal of critical media reading is to empower students to actively participate in social and political processes by employing media in constructive manners and engaging in alternative media production (Kellner/Share 2007, 2019). In summary, media education is not just about critically understanding media; it should also promote critical analysis that encourages students to explore alternatives, leading to critical action and the demand for change (Buckingham 2019).

Teachers' perspectives on media literacy are determined using the four main approaches to media literacy: instrumental, protectionist, media arts education, and critical. These approaches are also used to interpret other research findings on teachers' attitudes and views on media literacy in the literature review in the next section.

3. Teachers' Perspectives on Media Literacy

Stein and Prewett (2009) conducted a pre-survey of 39 high school teachers and found that nearly all of them agreed that the primary objective of media literacy education is to prepare students for citizenship. Teachers from various regions of Texas participated in a workshop on media literacy education in social studies. According to a significant majority of teachers, the second most important objective was providing students with new tools for learning and self-expression. Other objectives of media literacy education that the teachers considered important included fostering student health and development, protecting students from harmful media, and encouraging enjoyment of and appreciation for media as an art form.

A qualitative study by Von Gillern et al. (2024) involving 111 pre-service elementary school teachers who participated in a digital literacy unit at a Midwestern research institution in the United States identified three themes regarding the pre-service teachers' perspectives on media literacy: evaluating the credibility of media messages, accessing and interacting with media, and safety. The ability to interact with media encompasses accessing and engaging with various forms of media such as creating and communicating one's own media messages. Regarding safety, participants noted that many websites and pieces of content are inappropriate and unsafe for students. Learning to avoid such sites is an essential part of media literacy and ensuring student safety. Based on the aforementioned approaches to media literacy, the results

of the research demonstrate that teachers' perspectives on media literacy fall into three categories: instrumental, protectionist, and creative.

In a study by Gretter and Yadav (2018) they employed three focus groups to analyze the views of twelve female pre-service teachers on the advantages of teaching media and information literacy. The results showed that a large proportion of the pre-service teachers (75 %) regarded preparing students for college as the primary benefit of teaching media and information literacy in their future classrooms. The participants had previously taken an introductory educational technology elective course at a Midwestern university, where they were introduced to the concept of media and information literacy during a two-week module. The elementary and secondary pre-service teachers also identified other benefits, including teaching students about internet safety (58 %), helping students with their personal lives (50 %), instructing students on how to evaluate information (33 %), and assisting students with research and paper writing (33 %). This results also show how instrumental and protectionist approaches are common and main stream perspectives among teachers.

The review of the literature reveals a significant lack of research on teachers' attitudes and perspectives regarding media literacy and education. It also demonstrates that a common thread is their concern for child protection and safety, as they perceive media to have negative effects on children. Therefore, the current research will help fill the existing gap in research in this area by

providing more insights on Austrian teachers' attitudes and perspectives on media literacy.

4. Method

This study addresses the following question:

What are the perspectives and views of Austrian in-service and pre-service teachers regarding media literacy?

Data were collected through an online survey at the beginning of two trainings on digital basic education ("Digitale Grundbildung") for teachers; three seminars for one term each (5 ECTS) at the University of Vienna for in-service and pre-service teachers, and a further education for in-service teachers (60 ECTS) at two university colleges for teacher education (Pädagogische Hochschule). We used convenience sampling, in which participants were willing and available to be studied (Creswell 2012).

The questionnaire developed for the research comprised both closed-ended and open-ended questions. The data were analyzed using both descriptive statistics and content analysis (Mayring 2000). The qualitative data were categorized using predetermined codes based on the four perspectives of media literacy: instrumental, protectionist, creative, and critical.

Any text that could not be categorized using these codes was considered a new code. These new codes then were analyzed to determine if they presented a new category or perspective on media literacy.

5. Results

The results provide an overview of the participants' demographics, their attitudes toward media literacy, their expectations for the "Digitale Grundbildung" trainings, their reasons for teaching media literacy, the elements of media literacy, and their understanding of media education.

5.1 Demographics

Of the 116 participants who responded to the survey, 34.48 % (40 respondents) identified as male, while 65.51 % (76 respondents) identified as female. 28.44 % of the participants were pre-service teachers, and the rest were in-service teachers. Table 1 shows that participants in the training were of different ages. The highest percentage belonged to the 20–24 age range (52.68 %), and the lowest percentage belonged to the 55–59 age range (1.8 %):

Age Group	N	%
20–24	59	52.68
25–29	11	9.8
30–34	16	14.2
35–39	8	7.1
40–44	8	7.1
45–49	5	4.48
50–54	3	2.67
55–59	2	1.8

Table 1: Teachers' Age

Table 2 shows that the majority of teachers (43.13 %) had a bachelor's degree. Only two teachers (1.96 %) had a Ph.D., while 29.4 % had a master's degree. Additionally, 18.63 % had BAFEP/BAKIP/KGP (vocational training in early childhood education), and 6.86 % had a degree from a teacher training academy:

Degree	N	%
BAfEP/BAKIP/KGP	19	18.63
Bachelor	44	43.13
Master/Diplom	30	29.4
Teacher Training academy	7	6.86
PhD	2	1.96

Table 2: Teachers' degree

5.2 Attitude toward Media Education and Literacy

In response to the question about their interest in media education (see Table 3), over half of the teachers surveyed (56 %) expressed a high level of interest, while 3.44 % reported being uninterested. 43.5 % were interested in media education:

Interest in media education	N	%
Very interested	46	39.6
Interested	66	56.9
Uninterested	4	3.44
Very uninterested	0	0

Table 3: Teachers' interest in media education

When asked about the importance of teaching media literacy (see Table 4), 61.7 % of respondents said it is “very important”, and 38.2 % indicated it is “important”. By contrast, no one (0 %) mentioned it as “unimportant” or “very unimportant”:

Importance of teaching media literacy	N	%
Very important	71	61.7
Important	44	38.2
Unimportant	0	0
Very Unimportant	0	0

Table 4: the importance of teaching media literacy

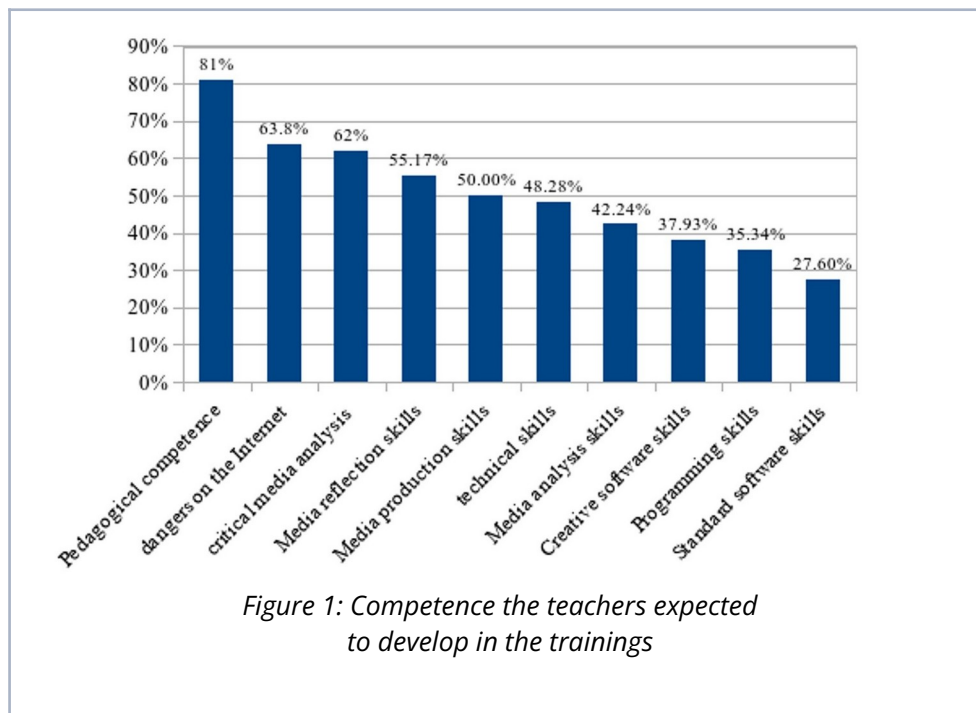
Regarding the subjects in which media literacy should be taught (see Table 5), nearly half (49.5 %) of the respondents said it should be taught in all subjects, while 1.7 % said it should not be taught in any subjects. Almost one-third (32.7 %) of the surveyed teachers suggested teaching media literacy as a separate subject. Only 15.9% said it should be taught in certain subjects:

Which subjects media literacy should be taught	N	%
All subjects	56	49.5
As a separate subject	37	32.7
Some subjects	18	15.9
None	2	1.7

Table 5: the subjects media literacy should be integrated

When it comes to the competencies they expected to learn and develop in “Digitale Grundbildung” training, the vast majority of teachers surveyed (81 %) reported pedagogical competence, which involves learning methods for teaching media literacy.

In contrast, developing standard software skills (operating systems, office software, etc.) was their least preferred option (27.6 %). Just over two-thirds of the respondents reported expecting to develop skills for dealing with dangers on the internet (cybermobbing, sexting, stalking, ...) and for critical media analysis (interests, power, and ideologies). The percentages were 63.8 % and 62 %, respectively. More than half of the respondents (55.17 %) indicated interest in developing media reflection skills (e.g., media systems, attention control, and news value). This were followed by 50 % for media production skills (e.g., content creation), 48.28 % for technical skills (e.g., how to use a device), 42.24 % for media analysis skills (e.g., symbols in video games and film genres), 37.93 % for creative software skills (e.g., video, audio, and image editing), and 35.34 % for programming skills (e.g., coding, algorithms, and modeling) (See Figure 1).

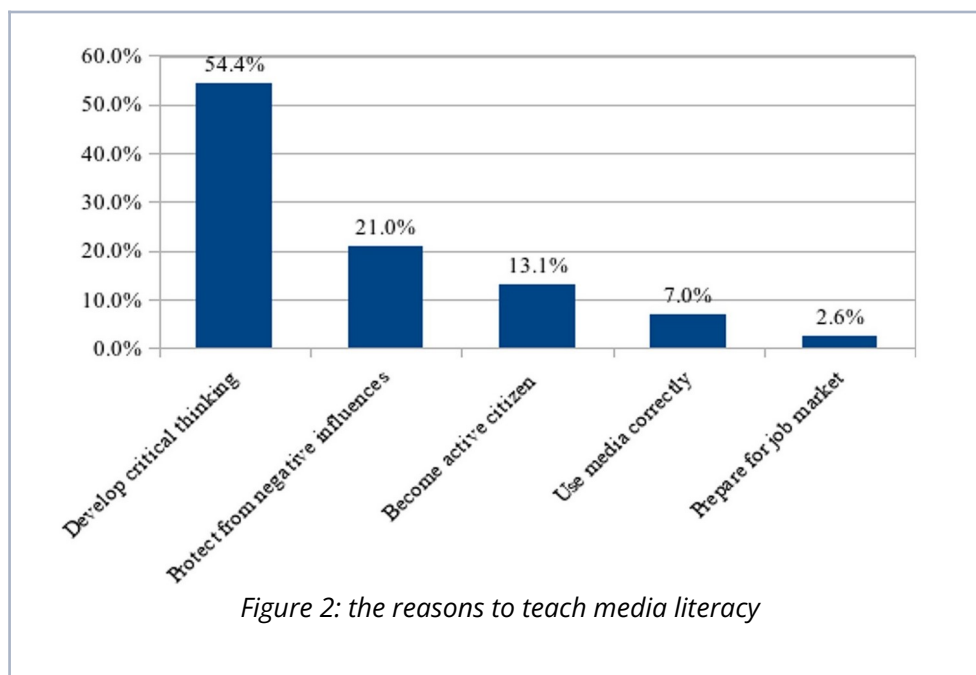


5.3 Perspective on Media Literacy

5.3.1 Reason to teach media literacy

Two questions addressed reasons for teaching media literacy from teachers' perspectives. One was a multiple choice question with an option of "other", and the other was an open-ended. As illustrated in Figure 2, the results of the closed-ended question show that developing critical thinking skills was the main reason reported by just over half of the respondents (54.4 %). The second reason, reported by significantly fewer respondents (21 %), was to protect students. 13.1 % of them indicated preparing children to become active participants in a democratic society as a reason.

Other reasons, such as teaching students how to use media correctly and preparing them for the job market, were reported by 7 % and 2.6 % of respondents, respectively:



Responses to the open-ended question differ from the quantitative findings and reveal four main themes. The first theme is protection, demonstrating that teachers consider media literacy important because students need protection from the dangers of the internet, such as cyberbullying. Students also need to learn how to recognize fake news.

The second theme is media ubiquity. Teachers believe that, since media is omnipresent and has become an integral part of our lives and society, teaching media literacy is necessary for dealing with it. The third theme is media use, which indicates that teach-

ers regard teaching media literacy as crucial because it develops technical skills and enables students to use new media and technology. The next theme is critical thinking, which is quite important, as is media use. It encompasses critical reflection and thinking on media content and use, awareness of the media, and the conscious and responsible use of the media.

5.3.2 Elements of media literacy

Analyzing the responses to an open-ended question about the components of media literacy for children and young people revealed three main themes. The first theme was media use. Respondents stated that media literacy for children should include teaching them how to use media and technology, particularly digital media such as smartphones, social media, computers, and the internet, as well as how to access information. The second theme was protection, which includes learning about the dangers of the media and how to use it safely and appropriately to protect oneself from harm. This involves controlling media consumption, ensuring security, protecting data, recognizing fake news, practicing self-regulation.

The third theme was critical thinking. This theme emphasizes a critical and reflexive view of media use and content, as well as the responsible use of different media, critical analysis, and conscious media use. Media creation was mentioned by some of the surveyed teachers. This included the creative production and design of media.

5.3.3 Understanding of Media Education

The coding and categorization of data regarding teachers' understanding of media education revealed the same main themes, albeit with different levels of importance. Critical thinking emerged as the primary theme, followed by media use and protection. Regarding critical thinking, teachers mentioned critical thinking and reflection about media as well as reflective and responsible media use. Similarly, protection indicates that teachers perceive media education as a means of raising awareness about the dangers of media and protecting students from the dangers such as cyberbullying, ensuring data protection and security and identifying fake news. In the next theme, media use, the teachers understood media education as learning technical skills and how to use different media. Only a few of the surveyed teachers mentioned media creation.

Overall, neither ideology critique nor identifying media bias were mentioned as elements of media literacy and media education. Teachers often used the word "critical," but its meaning was unclear. The ability to create media was also downplayed as a component of media literacy.

6.. Discussion

This study examines Austrian teachers' attitudes and perspectives on media literacy. Data were collected via an online survey of in-service and pre-service teachers before they received training in digital basic education ("Digitale Grundbildung").

The analysis of teachers' views indicates a positive attitude toward media literacy, as the vast majority of teachers surveyed were interested in media literacy. This is not astonishing since for most of them participating in the training is voluntary and they decided themselves to participate.

Additionally, they all believe that teaching media literacy to children and youth is important. Half of the respondents (49.5 %) indicated that media literacy should be incorporated into all school subjects, while one-third (32.7 %) think it should be a separate subject.

One notable finding is that the ability to teach media literacy was the most important skill expected to be learned in the "Digitale Grundbildung" training, mentioned by a significant majority. Although it is unclear whether they meant critical media literacy, more than half expected to develop the ability to analyze and reflect critically on media interests, power, ideologies, media systems, attention control and news value. These findings are promising because they demonstrate that most teachers are interested in learning the critical aspects of media literacy, such as ideological critique and questioning power.

Regarding the reasons for teaching media literacy, the quantitative results show that developing critical thinking skills is the main reason. However, the qualitative results show that protecting students from the dangers of media is the main reason, and critical thinking is the least important reason. One could assume that, from their perspective, critical thinking means protection.

Analyzing data collected from open-ended questions using common perspectives on media literacy—technical, protectionist, media art education, and critical—demonstrates that critical thinking was considered the third most important element, after media use and protection. One remarkable finding discloses that, contrary to the reasons for teaching media literacy and its components, critical thinking was the primary focus of respondents' understanding of media education.

The findings show that critical thinking is part of their view of media literacy. Although the word "critical" was often mentioned by the respondents, its meaning was unclear. Additionally, although many of the respondents expected to learn how to critique ideology, interest, and power in media, critique of ideology has no place in their perspective on media literacy; it was completely overlooked.

Media creation as an important element of media literacy receives very little attention in teachers' views of media literacy. Media creation is a key aspect of critical media literacy because it enables students to actively engage with media rather than merely critique it. As noted by Bigelow et al. (1994):

If we ask children to critique the world but then fail to encourage them to act, our classrooms can degenerate into factories of cynicism (p. 5).

In contrast to overlooking ideology critique and questioning power in media representation, protectionist and instrumental approaches were prevalent among the surveyed teachers. Considering the media as the cause of many problems among children, media literacy is perceived as a tool to protect students from the media's dangers and harms. They believe that media addiction, cyberbullying, fake news, and other negative influences of media can be mitigated by teaching media literacy. These findings confirm previous research results by Von Gillern et al. (2024) and Gretter and Yadav (2018) who identified protection and internet safety as key themes in teachers' views on media literacy.

One significant finding is that only a few participants considered preparing students to be civic participants in a democratic society (13.1 %) as a reason for teaching media literacy. Failing to consider this, as well as the lack of ideology critique and the downplaying of media creation in their view of media literacy and education, could result in viewing individuals as passive and inactive rather than as agents, subjects, and justice-oriented citizens who

critically assess social, political, and economic structures and consider collective strategies for change that challenge injustice and, when possible, address the root causes of problems [...] emphasize preparing students to improve society by critically analyzing and addressing social issues and injustices (Westheimer/ Kahne 2004: 5).

The ubiquity of media as a reason for teaching media literacy to students was indicated by many of the surveyed teachers. As Swertz (2012) contends, this justification lacks pedagogical reason and cannot stand alone as convincing. The mere presence of something does not make it pedagogically significant. In fact, media are not merely present like water on Earth. They are created by individuals and intertwined with human intentions. These intentions are brought into educational contexts when individuals engage with media in that setting (Swertz 2012). Media messages are produced and influenced by people, which is why they are not transparent windows to the world and reality, as Masterman (2003) points out.

7. Conclusion

The results of an online survey of 116 Austrian teachers who participated in digital basic education ("Digitale Grundbildung") trainings show that the teachers view media literacy education as important. However, they tend to focus more on protective and instrumental approaches than critical ones. Additionally, their critical thinking and reflections lacked consideration of ideology cri-

tique and power in media representation, as well as the significance of media creation. The teachers did not consider empowering students with a critical understanding of media by incorporating interrogation of ideology and questioning of power relations in media representation into their view of media education. The teachers also did not pay enough attention to creating alternative representations through media creation.

Considering the importance of teachers' views on media literacy as a foundation for media literacy education in schools, this paper provides valuable insights into teachers' perspectives on media literacy in Austria. Given the absence of critical analysis of ideology in their approach to media education, a significant shift in perspective is necessary if digital basic education ("Digitale Grundbildung") in Austrian schools aims to develop democracy and to foster justice-oriented citizens.

This study has several shortcomings. First, the small number of participants who completed the survey limits both the generalizability of the findings and the understanding of critical thinking. Additionally, surveys do not provide sufficient insight into teachers' views on media literacy. In-depth interviews with teachers could provide more insight. Future studies that collect data through interviews are recommended.

Lastly, entitling children to media literacy as a right (Swertz/Trültzsch-Wijnen 2021; Cannon et al. 2022) through the education system requires a fundamental shift in teachers' perspectives. Teachers must acknowledge that the best way to protect children is to

empower them with a critical and reflective understanding of the media. This could provide children with critical autonomy and prepare them to participate as active citizens in critical solidarity with their surrounding world (Share 2009).

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