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TEACHERS' USE OF MEDIA-RICH LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS TO PROMOTE CRITICAL AND REFLECTIVE THINKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

Abstract. Digital media are now common in foreign language education, yet their pedagogical value depends on how teachers use them to support higher-order thinking. This cross-sectional survey examined the reported use of media-rich tasks, perceived implementation challenges, and the role of teaching experience among 30 foreign language teachers from secondary schools and universities in Kazakhstan. We analyzed data from a 32-item online questionnaire using descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations; brief open-ended responses provided supplementary context. Teachers reported moderate use of tasks requiring source comparison, credibility and bias evaluation, reflection, and student-created digital content. The most frequently reported challenges concerned access to digital resources and curriculum or institutional constraints. Media-rich strategy use was positively associated with perceived challenges ($r = .77$, $p < .001$), whereas teaching experience was not significantly associated with either strategy use or perceived challenges. Because the design was cross-sectional and based on self-report, the positive correlation should not be interpreted causally. The findings suggest that access to digital tools is insufficient without pedagogical preparation, task and assessment models, and institutional support. The study contributes evidence from an under-researched Kazakhstani context and identifies priorities for professional development in media-rich foreign language pedagogy.

Keywords: media-rich learning environments, critical thinking, reflective thinking, foreign language teaching, digital media, Kazakhstan

Introduction

Digital media have become routine in foreign language classrooms through video, online texts, collaborative documents, learning platforms, and social media. However, their presence does not automatically create cognitively demanding learning. The central pedagogical question is how teachers design media-based tasks and what analysis, evaluation, and reflection those tasks require of learners.

This study focuses on instructional practices that extend beyond grammar and vocabulary instruction. When students compare sources, assess credibility and bias, and justify interpretations, they use language as a resource for critical inquiry. Media-rich learning environments are therefore understood here not simply as technology-equipped settings, but as pedagogically designed contexts in which multiple media formats support language use, analysis, and reflection (Hobbs & McGee, 2014).

Media literacy is most effective when embedded systematically across subject teaching rather than treated as an occasional add-on. Research on implementation in schools and teacher education indicates that sustained, purposeful integration is needed for learners to practice critical engagement with media in disciplinary contexts (Hobbs et al., 2024; Marlatt, 2020). These goals also align with media and information literacy, which connects access to information with analysis, evaluation, creation, and responsible participation (Singh et al., 2016). This is particularly relevant to foreign language education because learners encounter multilingual and multimodal content beyond the classroom, while classroom tasks can make interpreting and evaluating such content explicit.

Digital technologies have become increasingly prevalent in classrooms as teachers seek to develop students' critical thinking (Beikutova et al., 2024). Pedagogical integration is demanding: teachers must select age- and proficiency-appropriate materials, align tasks with curriculum goals, and assess reasoning expressed through an additional language. Evidence suggests that technology-supported environments can promote higher-order language and cognitive engagement when tasks require learners to analyze, evaluate, and create rather than merely access content (Beikutova et al., 2024; Hobbs & McGee, 2014).

In Kazakhstan, this issue warrants empirical attention because foreign language education operates across secondary and tertiary settings with differing access, curricular demands, and opportunities for professional learning. Evidence from Kazakhstan shows increasing interest in integrating media and language literacy, but teachers' own reported practices and constraints remain insufficiently documented (Beikutova et al., 2024).

Although critical thinking is widely endorsed in language education, classroom interaction does not always provide learners with sufficient opportunities to explain, question, and evaluate ideas (Li, 2011; Lin et al., 2016). Kazakhstani studies have highlighted the potential of collaborative and media-based tasks for intercultural awareness, communication, and critical engagement (Beikutova et al., 2024; Yelubayeva & Mustafina, 2020). However, little is known about how foreign language teachers across secondary and higher education in Kazakhstan report using specific media-rich tasks, the constraints they experience, and whether reported practice is associated with teaching experience.

Theoretical Framework

The study draws on three complementary perspectives. Sociocultural constructivism treats learning as the active construction of meaning through interaction and engagement with culturally situated texts (Vygotsky, 1978). The revised taxonomy of educational objectives distinguishes analysis, evaluation, and creation as higher-order cognitive processes and provides a lens for interpreting the task types examined in the survey (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). The TPACK framework explains why effective digital integration requires coordinated technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge, not technical access alone (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). Together, these perspectives support the study's focus on task design, teacher knowledge, and contextual constraints.

Existing research has explored media literacy and critical thinking in general educational contexts, but fewer empirical studies have examined the reported practices and constraints of foreign language teachers in Kazakhstan. The present study contributes a context-specific account by examining three elements together: the implementation of media-rich higher-order thinking tasks, perceived barriers, and teaching experience. Its contribution is descriptive and correlational rather than causal; it identifies patterns that can guide larger-scale and classroom-based research.

The research questions guiding this study are as follows:

RQ1. How frequently do foreign language teachers report implementing media-rich tasks intended to promote critical and reflective thinking?

RQ2. To what extent is reported use of media-rich pedagogical strategies associated with perceived implementation challenges?

RQ3. How are teaching experience and prior training in digital or media literacy related to reported use of media-rich pedagogical strategies and perceived challenges?

These questions distinguish technological access from pedagogical use and examine whether reported practice varies with perceived constraints and professional experience.

Methods and materials

This study employed a cross-sectional survey design with closed-ended quantitative items and supplementary open-ended responses. The design described how foreign language teachers reported implementing media-rich tasks and explored associations among strategy use, perceived challenges, and teaching experience.

Participants

The final analytic sample included 30 foreign language teachers from secondary schools and universities across Kazakhstan. A total of 35 questionnaires were submitted; five were excluded during eligibility screening (detailed below).

Participants' teaching experience ranged from 3 to 31 years and represented secondary, higher education, and combined teaching contexts. Purposive recruitment targeted teachers who used digital media or online resources at least occasionally, allowing investigation of variation in how they used those resources. The sample should therefore not be interpreted as representative of all foreign language teachers in Kazakhstan.

Instrument

Data were collected through a structured online questionnaire developed and distributed via Google Forms. The instrument captured teachers' reported use of digital media, implementation of media-rich higher-order thinking tasks, perceived challenges, and professional characteristics.

The questionnaire covered five areas:

- ✓ general information (gender, teaching context, and years of experience);
- ✓ use of digital media resources, interactive platforms, and authentic digital texts;
- ✓ media-based tasks intended to promote critical and reflective thinking;
- ✓ difficulties and constraints affecting media-rich pedagogy; and
- ✓ open-ended questions about participants' experiences.

Participants rated frequency items on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always). Challenge items used the same scale to indicate how often participants experienced each difficulty.

Content validity was examined through expert review by three specialists in educational technology and foreign language methodology, who assessed item relevance and clarity. Internal consistency across the closed-ended scale items was acceptable (Cronbach's $\alpha = .84$).

Before the main data collection, five foreign language teachers who were not included in the final sample reviewed a pilot version of the questionnaire. Their feedback informed minor wording revisions. The final instrument contained 32 items across the five areas and required approximately 12 minutes to complete.

Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire was distributed through professional networks, university mailing lists, and social media groups for language education professionals in Kazakhstan. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Before beginning the questionnaire, respondents read an information statement describing the study and indicated informed consent.

The survey remained open for three weeks, during which we circulated two reminders through the same channels. Thirty-five questionnaires were submitted in total. Five were excluded prior to analysis: four respondents' reported field of specialization was unrelated to foreign language teaching, and one respondent's answer to the open-ended item consisted of the instructional prompt text rather than a substantive response. Because this response suggested that the participant had not engaged attentively with the survey, we judged that the reliability of their responses to the closed-ended items could not be assumed, and therefore excluded the participant's entire questionnaire rather than treating only the open-ended item as missing. This left a final analytic sample of 30. Because invitations were also posted in professional groups, we could not calculate a precise response rate.

The study followed ethical principles throughout data collection. Participants were informed that responses would remain confidential and would be used solely for research purposes. No identifying information was collected, and participants could withdraw before submitting the questionnaire without consequence. Because the study involved anonymous, voluntary participation in an online questionnaire, collected no identifying information, and posed no more than minimal risk to participants, it did not require formal review or approval by an institutional research ethics committee under the authors' institutional policy.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, counts, and percentages, were calculated for participant characteristics, media-rich task use, and perceived challenges.

For the correlation analysis, we averaged the Likert items representing higher-order media-rich task use to form a strategy-use score, and we averaged the barrier items to form a perceived-challenges score. Internal consistency was acceptable to good for both composites when calculated separately (strategy-use $\alpha = .89$; perceived-challenges $\alpha = .77$). We analyzed teaching experience as a continuous variable.

We used two-tailed Pearson correlations to examine associations among strategy use, perceived challenges, and teaching experience. We set statistical significance at $p < .05$. Given the small purposive sample, we treated the correlations as exploratory estimates. We additionally examined the Pearson correlation assumptions using the Shapiro-Wilk test: the strategy-use composite did not depart significantly from normality ($p = .38$), whereas the perceived-challenges composite showed a significant departure ($p = .03$). Because this departure could affect the strategies-challenges correlation, we also computed Spearman's rank-order correlation as a robustness check; it confirmed a significant positive association in the same direction ($\rho = .56, p = .001$).

We reviewed brief optional open-ended responses inductively for recurring contextual issues. We used them only to support interpretation of the quantitative patterns and did not treat them as a separate qualitative dataset.

Results

After eligibility screening, we retained 30 responses. Participants taught in secondary schools, universities, or both, and their teaching experience ranged from 3 to 31 years. Table 1 reports respondents' demographic characteristics by number (N) and percentage.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	N	%
Gender	Female	27	90.0
	Male	3	10.0
Teaching level	Secondary	19	63.3
	Higher education institutions	4	13.3
	Both	7	23.3
Digital/media literacy training	Yes	25	83.3
	No	5	16.7

Note. $N = 30$. Percentages may not total 100 because of rounding.

Descriptive statistics also examined how often teachers used four broad categories of digital media resources, rated on the same five-point scale. Table 2 presents the percentage distribution of responses. Teachers used authentic digital texts and multimedia content most frequently, while student-produced digital content was less frequent but still common.

Table 2
Frequency of Teachers' Use of Digital Media Resources (%)

Digital Media Category	Never (%)	Rarely (%)	Sometimes (%)	Often (%)	Always (%)
Authentic digital texts	0.0	3.3	43.3	23.3	30.0
Multimedia (video/audio) content	0.0	10.0	23.3	36.7	30.0
Interactive digital tools/platforms	0.0	13.3	23.3	33.3	30.0

Student-produced digital content	0.0	13.3	20.0	40.0	26.7
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Note. Items were rated from 1 (never) to 5 (always). N = 30.

To answer RQ1, Table 3 summarizes the reported frequency of four media-rich tasks intended to activate higher-order thinking; SD stands for ‘standard deviation’ and shows how much participants’ responses vary around the mean (M) – scores clustered around the scale midpoint indicate moderate implementation.

Tasks requiring students to compare media sources (M = 3.15, SD = 1.13), evaluate the credibility or bias of media content (M = 3.33, SD = 1.11), and complete reflective activities linked to media use (M = 3.30, SD = 1.14) were reported at moderate frequency. Students rated student-created digital content highest (M = 3.59, SD = 1.05).

Student-created digital content received the highest rating, whereas comparing different media sources received the lowest. Because 3 represents the scale midpoint, the results indicate intermittent rather than consistently frequent use. The narrow range of means across the four items also suggests that no task type was implemented at a uniformly high level.

Overall, teachers reported using media-rich higher-order thinking tasks sometimes to often, with source comparison less frequent than student digital production.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics for Higher-Order Thinking Tasks

Item	M	SD
Tasks comparing different media sources	3.15	1.13
Evaluating the credibility or bias of the media	3.33	1.11
Reflective activities linked to media use	3.30	1.14
Student-created digital content	3.59	1.05

Note. Items were rated from 1 (never) to 5 (always). N = 30.

To describe the challenges relevant to RQ2, Table 4 summarizes how frequently teachers reported six barriers to media-rich instruction.

The most frequently reported barriers were limited access to digital resources (M = 3.78, SD = 1.05) and curriculum or institutional constraints (M = 3.59, SD = 0.97). Other challenges included students’ varying digital skills (M = 3.37, SD = 0.88), limited instructional time (M = 3.33, SD = 1.14), insufficient training in media literacy (M = 3.33, SD = 1.04), and difficulty assessing critical thinking (M = 3.30, SD = 0.99).

The pattern shows that constraints were not confined to infrastructure. Teachers also reported pedagogical concerns, particularly insufficient media literacy training and difficulty assessing critical and reflective thinking. Brief open-ended comments echoed limited institutional support, time pressure, and assessment design; these comments were used only as contextual evidence.

Table 4
Challenges in Using Media-Rich Learning Environments

Challenge	Mean	SD
Limited instructional time	3.33	1.14
Lack of access to digital resources	3.78	1.05
Insufficient training in media literacy	3.33	1.04
Students’ varying digital skills	3.37	0.88
Curriculum/institutional constraints	3.59	0.97
Difficulty assessing critical thinking	3.30	0.99

Note. Items were rated from 1 (never) to 5 (always). N = 30.

To address RQ2 and RQ3, Table 5 reports correlations among media-rich strategy use, perceived challenges, and teaching experience. Strategy use was strongly and positively associated with perceived challenges ($r = .77$, $p < .001$): participants who reported more frequent strategy use also reported more frequent challenges. This association does not establish direction or causality. No significant association was detected between strategy use and teaching experience ($r = -.03$, $p = .883$) or between perceived challenges and teaching experience ($r = .04$, $p = .862$). In this small purposive sample, years of teaching experience did not explain variation in either reported strategy use or perceived challenges. Addressing the second professional characteristic in RQ3, an independent-samples t-test compared strategy-use scores between teachers who reported prior training in digital or media literacy ($n = 25$) and those who did not ($n = 5$). No significant difference emerged, $t(28) = 0.43$, $p = .68$, indicating that self-reported training was not associated with greater strategy use in this sample; this null result should be interpreted cautiously given the small and unequal group sizes.

Table 5

Correlations Among Teacher Experience, Perceived Challenges, and Media-Rich Pedagogical Strategies

Variable pair	r	p
Media-rich strategies ↔ Perceived challenges	.77	< .001
Media-rich strategies ↔ Teaching experience	-.03	.883
Perceived challenges ↔ Teaching experience	.04	.862

Note. N = 30. Two-tailed tests

Discussion

The findings distinguish access to digital media from cognitively purposeful use. Although participants were recruited from teachers who used digital resources, their reported implementation of tasks involving source comparison, credibility evaluation, reflection, and student production remained moderate. This supports the view that technology integration depends on pedagogical task design rather than on tool availability alone (Hobbs & McGee, 2014; Mishra & Koehler, 2006).

From a TPACK perspective, the pattern is consistent with a possible imbalance among technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge. A digital resource can present information without changing the reasoning demands placed on learners. Media-rich pedagogy becomes more cognitively demanding when students analyze sources, make evidence-based comparisons, justify interpretations, and create media for a defined audience.

The moderate use of higher-order tasks points to a need for methodological support focused on comparison, credibility evaluation, reflective interpretation, digital production, and assessment. Research on critical media literacy similarly emphasizes that teachers require more than technical familiarity to turn media into a resource for inquiry and reflection (Hobbs et al., 2024; Marlatt, 2020).

The strong positive association between strategy use and perceived challenges requires cautious interpretation. One possibility is that teachers who attempt more complex media-rich practices become more aware of time, access, assessment, and institutional constraints. Other explanations are also plausible: teachers facing demanding contexts may adopt more strategies in response, and common self-report measurement may inflate the association. The cross-sectional design cannot distinguish among these explanations.

We found no statistically significant relationship between teaching experience and strategy use. This result suggests that years in the profession alone may not reliably indicate media-rich pedagogical practice. However, the small sample limits statistical power, so the result should not be interpreted as evidence that experience is irrelevant in the wider teacher population.

Professional development should therefore be available across career stages and should focus on practice rather than seniority. Useful formats may include collaborative task design, analysis of student responses, peer observation, and iterative refinement of media-based lessons.

These implications align with critical media literacy research, which emphasizes guided analysis, evaluation, and production rather than passive consumption (Hobbs & McGee, 2014). Institutional support is also relevant because access, curriculum constraints, and time were among the most frequently reported barriers.

The study's principal contribution is a context-specific distinction between using digital resources and designing media-rich tasks for higher-order thinking. By examining task use, perceived barriers, and teaching experience together, the study provides exploratory evidence from Kazakhstan and raises questions for larger, more direct investigations of classroom practice.

Conclusion

This study examined how foreign language teachers in Kazakhstan reported using media-rich tasks to promote critical and reflective thinking, the challenges they experienced, and whether teaching experience was associated with those reports. A cross-sectional survey of 30 teachers combined descriptive statistics with exploratory correlation analysis.

Participants reported moderate use of tasks requiring source comparison, credibility and bias evaluation, reflection, and student digital production. They also reported structural and pedagogical constraints, especially access to digital resources and curriculum or institutional limitations. More frequent strategy use was associated with more frequent perceived challenges, but the design does not permit a causal explanation.

Teaching experience was not significantly associated with strategy use or perceived challenges in this sample. This finding should be interpreted cautiously because the sample was small and purposively selected. It nevertheless suggests that professional learning in media-rich pedagogy should not be restricted to novice teachers.

The findings support viewing media-rich learning environments as pedagogically designed systems rather than settings defined by technology alone. Teacher education and professional development should provide concrete models for designing tasks that activate analysis, evaluation, reflection, and media production. Institutions can support this work by improving access, allocating planning time, and developing assessment guidance for higher-order outcomes.

Sustained, curriculum-embedded professional learning is preferable to one-off technical workshops. Collaborative lesson design, peer observation, and reflective practice communities may help teachers test and refine media-rich tasks in their own contexts.

Several limitations qualify the findings. The sample was small, purposive, and limited to one national context; the study analyzed secondary and higher education teachers together. The study relied on self-report, and the cross-sectional design cannot establish temporal order or causality. Common-method variance may also have contributed to the strong correlation between strategy use and perceived challenges. The brief open-ended responses did not constitute a full qualitative component. Future research should use larger stratified samples, report subgroup comparisons, validate the composite measures, and combine surveys with interviews, classroom observations, and analysis of learner work.

Digital media can support critical and reflective thinking in foreign language education when access is combined with deliberate task design, appropriate assessment, and sustained professional and institutional support.

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ШЕТЕЛ ТІЛІ САБАҚТАРЫНДА СЫНИ ЖӘНЕ РЕФЛЕКСИВТІ ОЙЛАУДЫ ДАМУҒА ҮШІН МҰҒАЛІМДЕРДІҢ МЕДИАРЕСУРСТАРҒА БАЙ ОҚУ ОРТАСЫН ПАЙДАЛАНУЫ

Аңдатпа. Қазіргі уақытта цифрлық медиа шетел тілін оқытуда кеңінен қолданылады, алайда олардың педагогикалық құндылығы мұғалімдердің бұл құралдарды жоғары деңгейлі ойлау дағдыларын дамыту үшін қалай пайдаланатынына байланысты. Бұл көлденең қималық сауалнамалық зерттеуде Қазақстандағы орта мектептер мен жоғары оқу орындарында жұмыс істейтін 30 шетел тілі мұғалімінің медиамен байытылған тапсырмаларды қолдануы, оларды жүзеге асыруда кездесетін қиындықтар және педагогикалық тәжірибенің рөлі қарастырылды. 32 тармақтан тұратын онлайн сауалнама арқылы жиналған деректер сипаттамалық статистика мен Пирсон корреляциясы негізінде талданды; ашық сұрақтарға берілген қысқаша жауаптар қосымша контекст ұсынды. Мұғалімдер дереккөздерді салыстыруды, ақпараттың сенімділігі мен біржақтылығын бағалауды, рефлексия жасауды және білім алушылардың цифрлық контент әзірлеуін талап ететін тапсырмаларды орташа деңгейде қолданатынын көрсетті. Ең жиі аталған қиындықтар цифрлық ресурстарға қолжетімділікке және оқу бағдарламасы мен институционалдық шектеулерге қатысты болды. Медиамен байытылған стратегияларды қолдану мен мұғалімдер қабылдайтын қиындықтар арасында оң байланыс анықталды ($r = .77$, $p < .001$), ал педагогикалық тәжірибе стратегияларды қолданумен де, қабылданатын қиындықтармен де статистикалық тұрғыдан маңызды байланыс көрсетпеді. Зерттеу көлденең қималық дизайнға және өзіндік есеп беру деректеріне негізделгендіктен, анықталған оң корреляцияны себеп-салдарлық байланыс ретінде

түсіндіруге болмайды. Нәтижелер цифрлық құралдарға қолжетімділіктің өзі жеткіліксіз екенін және оны педагогикалық даярлықпен, тапсырмалар мен бағалау үлгілерімен, сондай-ақ институционалдық қолдаумен толықтыру қажет екенін көрсетеді. Зерттеу аз зерттелген қазақстандық контекст бойынша эмпирикалық деректер ұсынып, медиамен байытылған шетел тілін оқыту саласындағы кәсіби дамудың басым бағыттарын айқындайды.

Түйін сөздер: медиамен байытылған оқу орталары, сыни ойлау, рефлексивті ойлау, шетел тілін оқыту, цифрлық медиа, Қазақстан

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ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЕ УЧИТЕЛЯМИ ОБРАЗОВАТЕЛЬНОЙ СРЕДЫ, НАСЫЩЕННАЯ МЕДИАРЕСУРСАМИ ДЛЯ РАЗВИТИЯ КРИТИЧЕСКОГО И РЕФЛЕКСИВНОГО МЫШЛЕНИЯ НА ЗАНЯТИЯХ ПО ИНОСТРАННОМУ ЯЗЫКУ

Аннотация. Цифровые медиа получили широкое распространение в обучении иностранным языкам, однако их педагогическая ценность зависит от того, как учителя используют их для развития мышления высокого уровня. В рамках данного одномоментного опросного исследования были изучены использование медиаобогащённых заданий, воспринимаемые трудности их реализации и роль педагогического опыта среди 30 учителей иностранных языков, работающих в средних школах и университетах Казахстана. Данные, полученные с помощью онлайн-анкеты, состоящей из 32 пунктов, были проанализированы с использованием описательной статистики и корреляции Пирсона; краткие ответы на открытые вопросы предоставили дополнительный контекст. Учителя сообщили об умеренном использовании заданий, предполагающих сопоставление источников, оценку достоверности и предвзятости информации, рефлекссию и создание учащимися цифрового контента. Наиболее часто упоминаемые трудности были связаны с доступом к цифровым ресурсам, а также с ограничениями учебной программы или институциональными ограничениями. Использование медиаобогащённых стратегий положительно коррелировало с воспринимаемыми трудностями ($r = .77$, $p < .001$), в то время как педагогический опыт не имел статистически значимой связи ни с использованием стратегий, ни с воспринимаемыми трудностями. Поскольку исследование имело одномоментный дизайн и основывалось на самоотчётах участников, выявленную положительную корреляцию не следует интерпретировать как причинно-следственную связь. Полученные результаты свидетельствуют о том, что одного лишь доступа к цифровым инструментам недостаточно без педагогической подготовки, моделей заданий и оценивания, а также институциональной поддержки. Исследование представляет эмпирические данные из недостаточно изученного казахстанского контекста и определяет приоритетные направления профессионального развития в области медиаобогащённого обучения иностранным языкам.

Ключевые слова: медиаобогащённая образовательная среда, критическое мышление, рефлексивное мышление, преподавание иностранных языков, цифровые медиа, Казахстан

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