Reflection: Critical Media Studies

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The critical media literacy (CML) approach has evolved into a pedagogical strategy that empowers people to critique and evaluate media messaging and recognize the power dynamics that govern cultures and influence social behavior (Hobbs, 2010). With CML individuals will acquire the skills of representing and examining the media pieces' systems, ideologies, and power structures. Moreover, they will develop the skills of creating media to question dominant discourse and support social change (Freire, 1970). For example, in Afghanistan, where the traditional gender roles are deeply entrenched in social life, CML is to be involved in analyzing how media/communication representations reinforce or debunk such roles, like considering how women are described in Afghan television dramas. I want to reflect on the concept of critical media literacy in the context of Afghanistan, presenting both challenges and opportunities.

Afghanistan has a diverse cultural landscape and a complex socio-political environment making it a unique setting for implementing CML in its schools. In Afghanistan, many traditional norms and values often intersect with modern media influences like believing in ethnic pride, restricting women to certain jobs, and so on. As a teacher, I noticed that equipping young students with the skills of critical analyzing of media messages and navigating them in a rapidly evolving media landscape is a pressing need. In my opinion, teaching critical media literacy in Afghanistan schools would involve adapting the principles of CML to suit the cultural and educational context of the country(Funk et al., 2016). One approach would be to incorporate local media examples and case studies that resonate with Afghan students, such as analyzing how Afghan television dramas portray social issues like gender roles or ethnic diversity. Teachers can use familiar media content to effectively engage their students in critical discussions about the identity and power representation in Afghan media (Albarrán et al., 2020).

Challenges

Access to technology and digital media resources in Afghanistan is a challenge that needs to be addressed. For example, urban areas may have better access to digital media like social media platforms/mobile apps but rural areas often lack such resources. Therefore, teachers have to be creative in finding ways how to teach critical media literacy to their students using available resources, like radio broadcasts, printed materials, or even community storytelling sessions (Albarrán et al., 2020). Additionally, there are many conservative cultural norms and societal taboos that might limit discussions about certain topics, like gender, sexuality, and especially religious beliefs. Teachers must have the ability to navigate these sensitivities carefully while still promoting open dialogue and critical thinking among students (Albarrán et al., 2020). As I taught in many different schools in different provinces of Afghanistan, I feel that teachers may need training on how to teach young students CML by incorporating media analysis activities into their lessons and facilitating discussions about sensitive topics (Hobbs, 2010).

Opportunities

Despite these challenges, integrating CML into Afghanistan Schools has a great potential for empowering young students to become informed, active, and critical participants in media discourse. When our young students are equipped with the skills to critically analyze and create media, we will witness media-savvy citizens who can challenge oppressive narratives and contribute to positive social change in Afghanistan.

In conclusion, teaching critical media literacy (CML) to Afghan young students is a crucial opportunity as it can empower them to navigate the complexities of the media landscape and help to make a positive social change. Adapting the principles of critical media literacy to

suit the cultural context of Afghanistan and addressing challenges like limited access to technologies in rural areas (even in urban areas), and conservative cultural norms/taboos will enable teachers/educators to foster critical thinking, empathy, and active citizenship among students. This approach can be applied by assessing local media instances and discourses as well as by upholding an open dialogue in which students will acquire valuable skills in the analysis of media messages and challenging oppressive narratives to promote social justice. By giving students the necessary tools to critically engage with media, teachers become the builders of a future generation who stand well-grounded and be a catalyst for a society where there is more tolerance built on social equality.

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