Research Paper   Open   Access

The Impact of Media School Clubs on Students' Media Literacy Skills, specifically for Sri Lanka

Dr. Nayana Suraweera
Senior Lecturer Department of Mass Media University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

ABSTRACT:- Media literacy, defined as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and participate in media, is a vital skill in today's media-saturated world. With students constantly exposed to media messages, cultivating media literacy has become a key educational goal. This research investigates the role and effectiveness of media school clubs in enhancing media literacy skills among secondary school students in Sri Lanka. Through a combination of surveys, interviews, and content analysis, the study examines how participation in media school clubs influences students to become critical media consumers and content creators. The findings demonstrate that students involved in these clubs develop a higher awareness of media influence, exhibit improved critical thinking, and enhance their communication and production skills. The study offers recommendations and best practices to strengthen media education, providing evidence-based insights for educators, policymakers, and media professionals in Sri Lanka.

I.   INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, media literacy has emerged as a vital skill for navigating a landscape filled with diverse media messages. Defined as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and participate in media, media literacy empowers individuals to become critical consumers and creators of media content (Hobbs, 2017). As students encounter a myriad of media platforms—from social media and news outlets to educational resources—developing these skills is essential for their academic success and informed citizenship (Kirk & MacPherson, 2018). A lack of media literacy can lead to difficulties in distinguishing credible information from misinformation, which is increasingly prevalent in today's information ecosystem (Levine, 2020).

Media school clubs have the potential to play a significant role in fostering media literacy among students by providing practical learning experiences and collaborative opportunities that go beyond the traditional classroom setting. These clubs serve as informal learning environments where students actively participate in the media creation process, helping to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Common activities include video production, photography, school newspapers, blogging, podcasting, and digital storytelling—each of which enhances students' ability to understand the structure, language, and influence of media (Baker et al., 2019; Tyner, 2014). Through these hands-on experiences, students are encouraged to engage with media messages critically, evaluate sources for credibility, and understand the ethical considerations of content creation (Hobbs & Jensen, 2009).

Furthermore, media clubs promote collaborative learning, where students work in teams to produce content, fostering communication, leadership, and problem-solving skills—key components of 21st-century education. This social learning context enables peer mentoring and constructive feedback, creating a supportive environment for skill development (Jolls & Wilson, 2014). Participating in such clubs also increases students' self-efficacy in navigating digital tools and platforms, empowering them to express their ideas effectively and responsibly (Livingstone & Helsper, 2007). In contexts like Sri Lanka, where structured media education may not be fully integrated into the curriculum, school media clubs serve as crucial incubators for cultivating media literacy and civic engagement among young people. By engaging with real-world media practices, students become not just consumers but thoughtful producers and analyzers of media content, aligning with the broader educational goals of media literacy.

Moreover, media school clubs can serve as vital supportive communities where students are encouraged to share ideas, collaborate on media projects, and learn from one another, thereby deepening their engagement with media literacy concepts (Thoman & Jolls, 2005). These collaborative environments foster peer-to-peer learning, promote creativity, and enhance students' ability to think critically about the media they consume and produce. Participation in such clubs helps students transition from passive consumption to active interpretation and responsible creation of media content, a process that is essential in today's digital society

(Kellner & Share, 2007). In the context of Sri Lanka, where formal media education in schools is still emerging, these extracurricular initiatives offer valuable opportunities for students to develop essential 21st-century skills. This research aims to investigate how media school clubs in Sri Lanka contribute to students' development of media literacy skills and to identify best practices that enhance the educational impact of these clubs. By providing empirical insights into the structure, content, and perceived outcomes of student participation, the study will inform educators, policymakers, and media professionals about the broader implications of integrating media literacy into extracurricular activities. Ultimately, the findings will contribute to the development of more effective, inclusive, and scalable models for promoting media literacy at the school level.

II.   OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

-        To explore the impact of media school clubs on students' understanding of media and communication.
-        To evaluate the effectiveness of school-based media activities in developing media literacy.
-        To identify best practices for implementing and improving media school clubs.
-        To provide policy and practical recommendations for integrating media education into the school system.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

In an era dominated by digital and mass media, students are continuously exposed to a wide range of media content that significantly influences their perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors. However, despite the growing media saturation in Sri Lanka, many students lack the critical skills necessary to understand, analyze, and engage with media responsibly and thoughtfully. Media literacy, which encompasses the ability to access, evaluate, create, and participate in media, has emerged as an essential competency for informed citizenship and academic success. While formal curricula often overlook practical media education, media school clubs offer a promising platform for developing media literacy through hands-on experience and collaborative learning. Yet, there is limited empirical research in the Sri Lankan context on the actual impact of these clubs on students' media literacy development. This study seeks to fill that gap by examining how participation in media school clubs shapes students' media understanding, critical thinking, and communication skills, and by identifying best practices and recommendations for enhancing media education in schools.

III.   LITERATURE REVIEW

THE IMPORTANCE OF MEDIA LITERACY

Media literacy is increasingly recognized as an essential competency in the 21st century. According to the American Association of School Librarians (AASL), media literacy enables individuals to critically evaluate media messages, understand their impact, and create their content responsibly (AASL, 2018). Research indicates that strong media literacy skills are associated with improved academic performance and greater civic engagement (Hobbs, 2017).

The importance of media literacy in the twenty-first century is becoming more widely acknowledged, especially as technology advances and changes how people engage with information. Being media literate is essential for navigating this complicated environment in a world where media messages are abundant and come from a range of sources, including social media platforms and traditional news outlets (Hobbs, 2017). A variety of abilities are included in media literacy, such as the capacity to access, examine, assess, produce, and engage with media content (Hobbs & Jensen, 2009).

Media literacy is essential for developing critical thinking, according to the American Association of School Librarians (AASL). It helps people to assess media messages critically, comprehend their effects, and responsibly produce their material (AASL, 2018). Given the frequency of false information and biased reporting, which can skew public perception and affect society sentiments, this ability is especially crucial (Levine, 2020). Accordingly, media literacy is a fundamental component of informed citizenship in democracies as well as a tool for personal empowerment (Kirk & MacPherson, 2018).

Studies indicate a robust association between media literacy abilities and a number of advantageous consequences, such as enhanced academic achievement and increased civic involvement. According to research, kids who are proficient in media literacy, for example, typically do better academically because they are better at applying critical thinking techniques and combining knowledge from various sources (Hobbs, 2017). Additionally, those with higher media literacy are more likely to participate in political processes and contribute to community conversations, which is associated to enhanced civic participation (Mihailidis & Thevenin, 2013).

In a time when the media greatly shapes public opinion and discourse, this involvement is crucial. Furthermore, media literacy is essential for social interaction and personal growth in addition to academic and civic engagement. Gaining media literacy enables people to use social media ethically and have healthier online relationships, creating a more positive online atmosphere (Thoman & Jolls, 2005). Media literacy integration

into curricula is becoming more and more crucial as educational institutions work to prepare students for the needs of the modern world.

IV.   MEDIA SCHOOL CLUBS AS EDUCATIONAL CATALYSTS

Media school clubs provide a structured environment for students to engage with various forms of media. These clubs often focus on activities such as video production, journalism, and digital storytelling, which allow students to explore media creation and analysis (Baker et al., 2019). Previous studies suggest that participation in media clubs promotes collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking, all of which are fundamental components of media literacy (Hobbs & Jensen, 2009).

Students can interact with media in a controlled and encouraging atmosphere thanks to media school clubs, which are essential educational catalysts. These clubs usually concentrate on practical pursuits such as multimedia projects, digital storytelling, journalism, and video creation. Students can investigate media creation and analysis, which are crucial elements of media literacy, by taking part in these activities (Baker et al., 2019). Research indicates that media school clubs foster a collaborative learning atmosphere where students can work together on projects, share ideas, and learn from one another. This collaboration not only enhances their understanding of media concepts but also builds essential teamwork skills (Hobbs & Jensen, 2009). Such environments encourage students to take risks in their creativity, allowing them to experiment with different media formats and styles, which is crucial for developing innovative thinking (Hobbs, 2017).

Moreover, the integration of media clubs into educational settings has been shown to promote critical thinking skills among students. Activities that require students to analyze media messages, evaluate sources, and create their content necessitate a higher level of cognitive engagement. This engagement is fundamental in helping students to develop the ability to question the reliability and intent behind media messages, thereby fostering a more informed and critical perspective (Thoman & Jolls, 2005).

A study by Deabenderfer et al. (2019) highlights the effectiveness of media clubs in enhancing students' media literacy skills through experiential learning. The findings suggest that students who participated in media clubs demonstrated improved abilities to critically analyze media content and produce their own media messages. This hands-on experience is essential for preparing students to navigate and contribute to the increasingly complex media landscape effectively.Furthermore, the role of media school clubs extends beyond the classroom, as they often encourage students to engage with their communities through projects that address local issues. This engagement not only reinforces their learning but also cultivates a sense of civic responsibility and awareness (Mihailidis & Thevenin, 2013). By connecting media literacy education with community involvement, students are better equipped to understand the real-world implications of media consumption and production.

THE ROLE OF EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES IN EDUCATION

Extracurricular activities, including media clubs, have been shown to enhance students' academic and social skills. Fredricks and Eccles (2006) found that students involved in extracurricular activities demonstrate higher levels of engagement and improved academic outcomes. Additionally, research by Thoman and Jolls (2005) emphasizes the role of media literacy education in developing critical thinking skills, suggesting that media clubs can be instrumental in fostering these competencies among students.

Students' academic and social abilities are greatly improved by extracurricular activities, such as media clubs. Students have the chance to participate in learning experiences outside of the conventional classroom setting thanks to these activities. Students who participate in extracurricular activities have greater levels of engagement and better academic results, according to research by Fredricks and Eccles (2006). According to their findings, engaging in these kinds of activities promotes a feeling of community and dedication to learning, both of which can lead to improved academic achievement and increased motivation.

Moreover, extracurricular activities offer a platform for students to develop crucial life skills such as teamwork, leadership, and time management. These skills are not only essential for academic success but also for personal and professional development. Students involved in media clubs, for instance, learn to collaborate on projects, communicate effectively, and manage their time efficiently while balancing various commitments (Eccles & Barber, 1999). Such experiences contribute to building confidence and resilience, equipping students with the tools they need to navigate future challenges.

Research by Thoman and Jolls (2005) emphasizes the importance of media literacy education within the context of extracurricular activities. Their work underscores that media clubs can be instrumental in fostering critical thinking skills among students. By engaging in activities that require media analysis, content creation, and evaluation, students develop the ability to think critically about media messages. This critical perspective is essential in today's media-saturated environment, where individuals must discern credible information from misinformation (Hobbs, 2017).

Furthermore, extracurricular activities like media clubs allow students to explore their interests and passions in a supportive environment. This exploration can lead to increased self-awareness and personal growth, as students discover new talents and develop a deeper understanding of their own values and beliefs (Larson, 2000). The opportunity to engage in creative pursuits, such as filmmaking or journalism, can also enhance students' motivation to learn, as they connect their academic studies with real-world applications (Baker et al., 2019).

In addition to individual benefits, extracurricular activities can foster a sense of community and social responsibility among students. Participation in media clubs often involves projects that address local issues or promote civic engagement, encouraging students to apply their media literacy skills in meaningful ways (Mihailidis & Thevenin, 2013). This connection between media literacy and community involvement highlights the broader impact of extracurricular activities on students' social development.

III.   METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study used a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews and content analysis.

SAMPLE

The study sample comprised a selection of ten government and private schools located in the Colombo, Gampaha, and Kandy districts of Sri Lanka, all of which maintain active media clubs. These schools were purposively selected to represent diverse educational settings and regional characteristics, ensuring a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic. The participant pool included 200 secondary school students, equally divided into two groups: 100 students who were active members of their respective school media clubs and 100 students who had no affiliation with media clubs. This comparative design enabled the study to examine differences in media literacy skills between participants engaged in structured media-related extracurricular activities and those who were not. In addition to student participants, the study also included 10 media club coordinators, whose insights were crucial in understanding the operational dynamics, educational goals, and pedagogical strategies of media clubs. Furthermore, five school principals were interviewed to explore the institutional perspective on the role of media clubs in student development and media education. Together, this sample provided a balanced and multi-stakeholder view of how media school clubs influence media literacy development in Sri Lankan schools.

TOOLS FOR DATA COLLECTION

To comprehensively assess the impact of media school clubs on students' media literacy skills, the study employed a triangulated approach to data collection using three key tools. First, a structured questionnaire was designed to measure media literacy based on the five core competencies: access, analyze, evaluate, create, and participate. This tool was administered to both media club members and non-members to quantify differences in skill levels and perceptions. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected students and teachers to gain in-depth qualitative insights into their experiences, motivations, and perceptions regarding media education and club participation. These interviews helped uncover the nuanced ways in which media literacy is internalized and applied by students. Third, the study involved content analysis of student-created media outputs such as newsletters, short videos, and blogs. This analysis provided tangible evidence of students' creative and critical engagement with media, allowing researchers to assess their ability to apply media literacy competencies in practice. By combining quantitative and qualitative methods, this multi-tool approach ensured a robust and holistic understanding of how media school clubs contribute to developing students' media literacy.

IV.   DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

The quantitative data collected through structured questionnaires provides clear evidence of the positive influence media school clubs have on enhancing students' media literacy skills. The comparison between media club members and non-members highlights measurable differences across key competencies, including critical evaluation, content creation, and ethical awareness.

- **Critical Evaluation Skills:** A significant 78% of students actively participating in media clubs demonstrated the ability to critically assess media content by identifying bias, propaganda techniques, and misinformation in news articles. In contrast, only 42% of non-members exhibited the same capability. Furthermore, 65% of media club members correctly identified clickbait headlines in a controlled test, while just 30% of non-members managed to do so. This suggests that regular engagement with media analysis activities equips students with essential cognitive tools for discerning reliable information.

- **Content Creation Skills:** When asked about their confidence and ability to create or edit media content using digital tools, 81% of media club members reported a high level of proficiency. These students were regularly involved in producing newsletters, short videos, podcasts, and blogs. On the other hand, only 27% of non-members expressed similar confidence. Additionally, 74% of club members reported prior experience with media editing software (e.g., Canva, Adobe Premiere, Audacity), compared to just 18% among non-members, indicating a wide skills gap in digital media production.

- **Media Awareness and Ethical Practices:** Ethical understanding was another area where media club members significantly outperformed their peers. About 72% of club participants demonstrated knowledge of ethical media practices such as attribution, avoiding stereotypes, respecting privacy, and understanding the impact of misinformation. In comparison, only 39% of non-members exhibited such awareness. Moreover, when presented with real-life ethical dilemmas in a questionnaire, 68% of club members selected appropriate, responsible responses, while only 33% of non-members did so.

These findings demonstrate that students involved in media school clubs not only possess stronger analytical and technical skills but are also more aware of their responsibilities as media users and creators. The data provides strong justification for integrating media education programs more widely in the school curriculum to promote media literacy among all students.

QUALITATIVE RESULTS

The qualitative data, gathered through interviews with students, teachers, and media club coordinators, as well as content analysis of student-produced media, provided rich insights into the broader impacts of media school clubs on students' development.

FROM INTERVIEWS

Students consistently shared that being part of a media club enhanced their communication, critical thinking, and collaboration skills. Many students noted that they became more confident in expressing their opinions, presenting ideas, and working in teams. One student remarked, *"Before joining the club, I was shy to speak in front of others. Now, I lead interviews and moderate panel discussions at school events."* Teachers echoed these sentiments, observing that media club members often performed better in classroom group discussions, writing tasks, and oral presentations. They also highlighted the students' improved media judgment, especially in discussions about advertisements, social media trends, and news credibility.

CONTENT REVIEW

The content produced by the students—including school newsletters, blogs, short documentaries, and video reports—demonstrated a mature awareness of current events, social issues, and ethical reporting standards. Students tackled themes such as climate change, cyberbullying, gender equality, and community service. Most productions included proper source attribution and fact-checked data, reflecting their grasp of responsible journalism. Additionally, the use of inclusive language and avoidance of harmful stereotypes showed their growing understanding of media ethics and diversity.

Together, these qualitative findings complement the quantitative results, reinforcing the conclusion that media school clubs not only build technical media skills but also cultivate broader academic, ethical, and interpersonal competencies that benefit students both inside and outside the classroom.

V.   DISCUSSION

The findings from this study strongly affirm the hypothesis that media school clubs significantly contribute to the development of students' media literacy skills. Quantitative data revealed that 78% of media club members were able to identify bias and misinformation in media content, compared to only 42% of their non-member peers. Similarly, 81% of members expressed confidence in using editing and design software, while just 36% of non-members reported the same level of familiarity. In terms of ethical media understanding, 72% of media club students demonstrated awareness of responsible media practices, including respecting copyright, avoiding harmful content, and ethical reporting—nearly double the rate of non-participants (39%). These metrics clearly highlight the value of media clubs as effective learning environments for practical and critical media engagement.

Media school clubs function as unique, experiential learning spaces where students are immersed in activities such as journalism, digital storytelling, video editing, podcasting, and social media analysis. These hands-on opportunities enable students to move beyond passive media consumption to active media creation and evaluation. This aligns with existing literature, such as Hobbs (2010) and Thoman & Jolls (2005), which emphasize the effectiveness of experiential learning in enhancing critical thinking and digital competence. Furthermore, qualitative interviews confirmed that club participation fosters self-confidence, media awareness,

and civic responsibility. One student noted, "Before joining the club, I never questioned what I saw on social media. Now, I always look for the source and motive."

In addition to media literacy, these clubs cultivate important 21st-century soft skills. Over 65% of club members reported improvements in public speaking, teamwork, and leadership. Students shared that collaborative media projects taught them how to manage time, delegate tasks, and give constructive feedback—skills applicable across academic and future career paths.

However, the study also revealed significant institutional and structural challenges. About 40% of surveyed media club coordinators indicated that their clubs lacked access to modern audiovisual equipment and updated software. In under-resourced schools, students had to rely on personal mobile phones or outdated computers, limiting the scope of their media production. Moreover, teachers reported limited training in media education, with over half expressing a lack of confidence in using digital media tools or integrating media literacy into their teaching practices.

Another challenge is curricular isolation. In most schools, media clubs function purely as extracurricular activities, with little to no integration into the formal curriculum. This separation undermines the potential for media literacy to be treated as a core competency, as recommended by global frameworks like UNESCO's Media and Information Literacy model.

Therefore, while the benefits of media clubs are well-documented in this study, their long-term success depends on strategic interventions. These include investing in teacher professional development, upgrading technological infrastructure, and integrating media literacy more systematically into school curricula. Collaboration with media professionals, NGOs, and policymakers can also enhance the relevance and sustainability of these clubs.

Ultimately, the findings support the view that media school clubs are powerful tools for equipping students with the critical media skills necessary for informed, ethical, and active participation in the digital world. As media continues to shape public opinion and daily life, fostering media literacy through school-based initiatives is not only beneficial but essential.

VI.   CONCLUSION

Media school clubs have emerged as a powerful and practical platform for enhancing media literacy among Sri Lankan students. The research findings clearly demonstrate that students who participate in media clubs significantly outperform their non-member peers across key literacy competencies. Specifically, 78% of media club members were able to detect bias and misinformation in media messages (compared to 42% of non-members), 81% felt confident using digital tools to produce content, and 72% demonstrated an understanding of ethical media practices, while only 39% of non-members showed similar awareness. These figures highlight the transformative impact of media clubs in cultivating critical thinking, digital creativity, and responsible content engagement.

Beyond skill development, media clubs also foster confidence, teamwork, and civic awareness, which are essential traits in a democratic and media-saturated society. Interviews and content analysis confirmed that students not only developed technical competencies but also a stronger voice to engage in social issues through their productions—be it newsletters, short films, or blogs.

However, the success of these clubs depends heavily on several enablers: well-trained teacher facilitators, adequate access to technology, administrative support, and curricular integration. In several cases, lack of funding, outdated equipment, and insufficient teacher training were cited as barriers that limit the full potential of these clubs.

In conclusion, media school clubs represent a scalable and cost-effective approach to building media literacy skills in Sri Lanka. They serve as a bridge between traditional classroom learning and the demands of a modern media environment. As media influence continues to grow in shaping public opinion, education, and youth identity, there is an urgent need for national education policy to formally recognize and invest in media literacy education. Expanding and strengthening school media clubs—with support from educators, media professionals, and policymakers—can play a vital role in preparing a generation of critical, ethical, and empowered media users and creators.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

REFERENCES

[1]. American Association of School Librarians (AASL). (2018). Media literacy: A guide for school leaders. AASL.

[2]. Baker, C. E., et al. (2019). The role of media literacy in education: A review of the literature. Journal of Media Literacy Education, 11(1), 1-15.

[3]. Eccles, J. S., & Barber, B. L. (1999). Student Council, Volunteering, Basketball, or Marching Band: What Kind of Extracurricular Involvement Matters? Journal of Adolescent Research, 14(1), 10-43. https://doi.org/10.1177/0743558499141002

[4]. Fredricks, J. A., & Eccles, J. S. (2006). Is Extracurricular Activity Participation Associated with Beneficial Outcomes? Developmental Psychology, 42(4), 698-713. https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.42.4.698

[5]. Hobbs, R. (2017). Media literacy in the digital age: A critical perspective. Journal of Media Literacy Education, 9(2), 1-9.

[6]. Hobbs, R., & Jensen, A. (2009). The importance of media literacy education for the twenty-first century. Journal of Media Literacy Education, 1(1), 1-9.

[7]. Jolls, T., & Wilson, C. (2014). The core concepts: Fundamental to media literacy yesterday, today and tomorrow. Journal of Media Literacy Education, 6(2), 68–78.

[8]. Kellner, D., & Share, J. (2007). Critical media literacy, democracy, and the reconstruction of education. Media Literacy: A Reader, 3–23.

[9]. Kirk, D., & MacPherson, H. (2018). Media literacy and the role of social media in the educational process. International Journal of Media and Information Literacy, 3(2), 75-85.

[10]. Larson, R. (2000). Toward a psychology of positive youth development. American Psychologist, 55(1), 170-183. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.170

[11]. Levine, A. (2020). The impact of media literacy on critical thinking in the age of information overload. Journal of Educational Research, 113(4), 210-218.

[12]. Mihailidis, P., & Thevenin, B. (2013). Media literacy as a tool for democracy: The role of media literacy in civic engagement. Journal of Media Literacy Education, 5(1), 1-11.

[13]. Thoman, E., & Jolls, T. (2005). Media literacy: A national priority for a changing world. American Behavioral Scientist, 49(3), 350-362.

[14]. Tyner, K. (2014). Literacy in a digital world: Teaching and learning in the age of information. Routledge.

Dr. Nayana Suraweera
Senior Lecturer Department of Mass Media University of Colombo, Sri Lanka