Media Literacy Levels of Naresuan University Students
ระดับการรู้เท่าทันสื่อของนักศึกษามหาวิทยาลัยนเรศวรม

Brent Martinez*
Vincent Martinez**

Abstract

The first two aims of this study were to develop a self-assessment questionnaire and investigate the media literacy levels of first-year undergraduate students. Additionally, two proceeding objectives were to identify students’ media skills and media knowledge needing attention or development and recommend some actions and suggest important points to consider in designing lessons for media literacy curricula and addressing most relevant skills and knowledge requiring improvement for higher-education students. The self-assessment media literacy questionnaire designed by the authors hinged on concepts reviewed from the literature and what most scholars contended to be what comprise media literacy. Mean of Index of Item Objective Congruence performed by 5 experts was 0.815, while test of reliability was $\alpha$ 0.891. The questionnaire had 40 items with a 4-point Likert-type scale (1-very low level, 4-very high level) assessing university students’ media literacy levels in four domains, i.e. cognitive, emotional, aesthetic and moral. The target participants (n=134) for media literacy level assessment were four intact groups of first-year university students of Naresuan University International College during the academic year 2015-2016. To countercheck student-respondents’ views, two qualified teacher-raters were asked to assess them. Assessment of teacher-raters had Two-Tailed Pearson correlation coefficient of .604 at 0.01 significance level, indicating acceptable agreement.

Results showed the following findings. 1) Students’ assessment of their over-all media literacy (ML) levels was at a high level ($x=2.73$, SD=0.39) while teacher-raters at a low level ($x=2.35$, SD=0.50). 2) Independent sample t-test of students’ assessment according to student-respondents showed no significant difference between over-all ML levels of males and females ($p$-value >0.05). On the other hand, teacher-raters found a significant difference. 3) One-Way ANOVA revealed significant differences of over-all ML levels according to program ($p$-value < 0.05), but no significant difference based on teacher raters’ assessment.

*Instructor, Faculty of Education, Naresuan University, Muang Phitsanulok 65000
**College of ASEAN Community Studies, Naresuan University, Muang Phitsanulok 65000
E-mail: brentmartinez291@gmail.com
4) Findings from analysis of both views indicated necessity of developing cognitive skills of students. The study suggested that the students’ lack particular media skills and knowledge areas. It may be recommended that student’s skills and knowledge of media production, grouping, analysis, evaluation, and summary skills should be given more consideration and time for development and practice when the teacher designs teaching and learning materials as well as in and out of classroom activities and assignments.

Keywords: Media Literacy levels, Knowledge and Skills, Naresuan University Students
Introduction

The oversupply of information as well as rapid development of various media channels and vehicles are not problem-free. The media are not just conduits but tools which could shape or manipulate people’s knowledge, attitudes, opinions and behavior. Additionally, the onslaught of information poses challenge of selection and dangers of media conditioning (Potter, 2004). Thus, the present world necessitates people to adopt new ways of understanding culture and new habits of mind (Jenkins, 2009). In this increasingly mediated life, especially of the younger generation, functioning effectively means possessing solid media knowledge (Adams & Hamm, 2010) and media skills (Potter, 2010), or what is referred to as media literacy. Lack of these skills and knowledge translates to serious disadvantage and consequences (Ibid) and may present a danger to society (Ashley, 2015). Proponents of media literacy claim that this literacy is the answer to those challenges, and that teaching it helps equip people for effective and safe use of the media. Its main aim is the empowerment of individuals to be in control of their media goals and habits as well as make well-informed decisions (Potter, 2004).

What is depicted in the literature is that media literacy is a multi-faceted phenomenon (Martens, 2010), and thus differences of media literacy approaches, understanding and definitions exist. Diversity and tensions were attributed to differing goals, motives, and instructional practices (Hobbs, 1998). In Potter’s (2010) review, “The State of Media Literacy,” he found that varying arguments in the field involved divergent ideas on how media literacy should be treated, i.e. as a critical cultural issue, set of pedagogical tools, suggestions for parents, or as a scholarly topic of inquiry. Consequently, it is not surprising to find varying methods of assessing media literacy. The same can be said in the case of media literacy in Thailand. Interpretation of what media literacy varies along with what skills and knowledge that comprise it and how they are evaluated (Nupairoj 2013, Bunnag 2012, Kheokao et. al. 2013).
Studies measuring media literacy levels, media habits, or skills of certain age-groups and in certain types of media, i.e. social media, TV, the Internet, newspaper and advertisements or combinations of them, are adequate and so as the variety of assessment tools. Other tools developed were for measuring what was termed new media literacy skills which involve social skills like participatory citizenship, networking, and responsible sharing of media content (Literat 2014, Lin et al. 2012, Jenkins, 2006). What these assessment tools have in common is that they all deal with skills and knowledge (although they differ in emphasis, descriptions, and range) of a media literate individual. In Thailand, while similar studies and assessment tools exists, there is still inadequate number of studies concerning university students’ media literacy skills (Nupairoj, 2013). Additionally, although studies on media literacy levels mostly involved relationships between media literacy and demographic, socio-economic, academic, and behavioral related variables (Ibid), there are not many studies assessing media literacy accounting for its multi-dimensionality. This is crucial as “media literacy requires that we acquire information and build knowledge in more than just the cognitive dimension but also consider information from emotional, aesthetic, and moral dimensions” (Potter, 2011, 20). This paper might contribute to this gap, although its primary aim was within the context of this study’s target participants. The media referred to in this study included traditional and new media as well as different media genres. In this sense, the study was aimed at assessing university students’ general media literacy. The following sections discusses media knowledge and skills as main components of media literacy and media literacy domains relevant to the purpose of the study.

**Media skills and media knowledge**

While opinions regarding media literacy definition, purpose and recipients run in various directions, there is agreement that media literacy comprises media skills and media knowledge. This is reflected in the content of media literacy definitions (see Potter’s Explicating the Construct of Media Literacy, 2004) and models (see for instance Four Component Model, Livingstone 2004; New Media Literacy Framework, Jenkins 2006; and Essential Competencies of Digital and Media Literacy, Hobbs 2010). The main differences of those definitions and models are on what knowledge and what skills are most relevant to media literacy and how they are defined, i.e. from general to specific or from simple to
elaborate. Nevertheless, they all speak of abilities and knowledge necessary for navigating the media world effectively and avoiding negative media effects. The media skills and media knowledge relevant to this study were identified based on frequency of use in definitions and models, claims of proponents, and their practicality to the participants and the context of the study. Potter’s seven skills of media literacy (2004, 123-135), foundational knowledge (75-94) and other skills essential to media literacy were adopted. The seven media literacy skills are analysis, evaluation, grouping, induction, deduction, synthesis and abstracting. Other skills the researchers included were access, production and networking skills (Sicharoen & Sicharoen 2012, Hobbs 2010, Jenkins 2006, Livingstone 2004).

Knowledge is equally important to be a media literate person. According to Potter (2013, 15), media literacy requires having strong knowledge in five areas: media content, media industries, media effects, the real world and the self (for extensive discussion see Chapter 5 of Theory of Media Literacy 2004). Martens’ (2010) synthesis of a huge academic work on media literacy also finds that media knowledge crucial to having high media literacy includes knowledge of media industries, media messages, media audiences, and media effects. Nupairoj (2015) similarly mentioned Thai scholars underscoring knowledge of mass media role, media language, media content and production.

Domains of media literacy (ML)

Media texts carry not only cognitive but also emotional, aesthetic, and moral elements which necessitates having them accounted for. Several scholars mentioned that other dimensions along with analytical reasoning work together in decision making (Sicharoen & Sicharoen 2012, Martens 2010), and that assessing media literacy requires measuring cognitive goals along with attitudinal and behavioural objectives (Scharrer 2002 cited by Bordac 2009). For example, Buckingham (2005 cited by Literat 2014) explains that media literacy involves affective ability such as appreciation of culture and enjoyment, Schmidt (2012) emphasized on need of aesthetic competencies in order to participate in the culture of media convergence, and Silverbatt et. al. (2014) on having strong moral values to evaluate attitudes, values and behaviour portrayed in media representations. In brief, the domains are described in the proceeding paragraph based on Potter’s explanations (2004, 2011).
Cognitive domain is where analytical and logical skills reside, and where factual information is stored. Information in this domain concerns dates, names, definitions, and the like. It is what media consumers rely on in their process of thinking and analysis and other processes which concern cognitive effort. Emotional domain is the seat of emotions and emotional ability. People’s experience and understanding of emotional scenes and manipulation by the media depend on their affective skills and knowledge. Aesthetic domain includes skills, knowledge, and understanding of media production and techniques. With it, individuals are better critics in terms of their evaluation of quality and content as well as be better informed of the conventions of the media as to how they frame or distort visual messages to influence or persuade people. Moral domain relates to values or cultural context. It is what people use to judge what is wrong and what is right. Strong moral domain assists people in their examination and comparison of values and behavior presented by the media to that of their own.

The collection and evaluation of these pieces of work led to the development of a self-assessment tool (details of which are discussed in the method section of this paper), which was the first purpose. To understand strengths and weaknesses of students’ over-all media literacy levels, media domains, as well as media skills and knowledge, the survey was conducted and was the second purpose. The general aim was simple: to assess students’ media literacy levels and use the findings to inform, design, and recommend university lecturers who were tasked to teach media literacy to consider the study’s results and suggestions when they develop their own media literacy curricula. The aim was in consonance with the core components and objectives of the media literacy course description of Naresuan University: “Knowledge, basic attributes necessary to access, understand, interpret, analyse leading to appropriate conclusions, so as to come up to par with stimuli coming through various contemporary media. The aim is focused on nurturing wise media consumers in graduates, responsible for one’s own behavior in society, not victimized, and carry out preventive measure for the society as a whole” (TQF3 NU). It is hoped that the findings would aid the researchers and lecturers concerned in deciding the best ingredients and approach in teaching and empowering university students to be more media literate individuals. Below were the purposes of the study and specific questions the study sought to answer.
Purposes of the Study

The purposes of the study are the following:
1. to develop a self-assessment questionnaire to be contextualised for teacher-raters
2. to investigate the over-all media literacy levels of first-year undergraduate students using the validated instrument and compare their media literacy levels,
3. to identify the media skills and knowledge needing attention.
4. to use results to recommend inclusion or emphasis of identified media skills and knowledge needing improvement when designing media literacy curricula and considerations media literacy teachers might have to think about when teaching university students enrolled in different programs.

Research Questions

1. What comprise the media literacy self-assessment questionnaire?
2. What are the over-all media literacy level and the media literacy domains’ level of the student-respondents according to their view and the view of the teacher-raters, and are their significant differences?
3. What are the skills or knowledge requiring more attention?
4. What recommendations or considerations may be suggested in teaching media literacy to university students and in improving their ML levels?

Methods and Materials

The study used descriptive-survey method to determine the over-all media literacy levels of the student-respondents and differences in terms of their demographics and media literacy domains. The statistical tools employed were Mean, Independent-sample t-test, and One-Way ANOVA.

Respondents

Using total population sampling, the whole population of first-year university students of Naresuan University International College (NUIC) were studied (n=159). The college has four programs. The number of students according to program varied, International Business Management, 48; English for Business Communications, 38; Tourism Business Management,
30; and Human Resource Management, 18. Media literacy as a subject is taught at Naresuan University and is offered to freshmen. The population distribution of male and female respondents was largely uneven, males 24.6% and females 75.4%.

Teacher-raters

The teacher-raters who participated in this research were two female lecturers. One has a background in applied linguistics (MA) and teaches English subjects and experience in using various media contents in class. The other is also an English teacher with MA in Mass communications and MA in English. Both teachers handle all students in all four majors and expressed confidence to the researchers that they could rate their students, an important criteria in deciding to select them.

Research Instrument

Media literacy is defined in terms of media knowledge and skills (Martens, 2010), and is multi-dimensional covering cognitive, emotional, aesthetic and moral aspects (Potter, 2004). In assessing the students’ over-all media literacy, a 40-item self-assessment questionnaire with a 4-point Likert scale was used, qualitatively interpreted as 1-very low, 2-low, 3-high, and 4-very high. The 4-point Likert was chosen to dissuade students from the temptation of ticking the middle number or average level. The sections included demographics and the four domains of media literacy. Each domain contained 10 items covering media skills and knowledge related to each type of domain. The statements were conceptually written based mostly on Potter’s skills of media literacy, i.e. analysis, evaluation, grouping, induction, deduction, synthesis, and abstracting, and foundational knowledge structures, i.e. media effects, media content, media industries, real world, and the Self. Three most-mentioned media literacy skills in the literature not found in Potter’s model were included, access, production and networking skills. The questionnaire underwent Index Item of Congruence by five experts (x=0.815) and reliability test (α 0.891) through pilot-testing which used 55 first year students having similar characteristics as the target participants. The questionnaire was made available in two languages, English and Thai. The Thai version was translated by an expert translator and lecturer teaching English to Thai, and Thai to English translation.
It should be noted that media literacy is not a category like a box but a continuum, where there are degrees (Potter 2013, 21), and thus being in the high level or low level does not necessarily mean there is no difference in the media literacy skills and knowledge of those in the lower range compared with those in other ranges within that level. This is the limitation of the instrument. Nevertheless, suffice it that the instrument served its purpose for the researchers’ context. Others who might want finer findings may adjust the scale range of the instrument.

Data Collection Procedure

Data gathering was a cross-sectional survey done at the site. The 20 minute-survey was not mandatory neither was there incentive given. Students were allowed to decline participation or to skip answering certain questions and had the choice to answer either the English or Thai version. The collection of data was done by three data collectors during the same day. A script was used to explain the purpose of the research, confidentiality, and to provide instruction about the survey before handing the questionnaires to the respondents. To control the limitations of self-assessment surveys such as respondent bias and truthfulness of response, the script emphasized the importance of voluntary participation and providing truthful and accurate information as random ticking and unreflective self-assessment could render the results unreliable. The data collectors were instructed to separate questionnaires completed under 10 minutes. Completed and valid questionnaires returned were 134. Questionnaires with several missing responses and those handed back under 10 minutes were excluded. To cross-check responses of student-respondents, two teacher-raters were asked to rate the students. They were chosen on the basis of their media background, their having taught the same students, and their assurance that they know the students. The teacher-raters had a two-hour discussion with the author to explain what the research was, its objectives, purpose, and their roles in the research. Additionally, they were allowed to skip scoring students whom they think they had doubts rating. A minimal monetary incentive was given to recompense their assistance. The same survey questionnaires, contextualized, were answered by the teacher-raters. 133 questionnaires which had pairs were selected. A simple correlation coefficient of teacher-raters’ responses was calculated using Two-tailed Pearson Correlation and had a result of 0.604 at 0.01 significance level, indicating moderate agreement.
Results

Media literacy self-assessment questionnaire

In developing the media literacy self-assessment questionnaire, a series of steps was carried out: (1) Survey of the literature, (2) Writing of the questions and translation, and (3) Validation by experts and reliability testing. The result was a 40 item questionnaire of media skills and knowledge distributed into four sections (domains), measured through Likert scale. Index Item of Congruence by five experts was $x=0.815$, while reliability testing was $\alpha =0.891$. As the media literacy literature showed, media literacy is mainly viewed as a set of media skills and media knowledge (Martens 2010, Potter 2004, Potter 2010, Potter 2013). This set of skills and knowledge is argued to be within four domains (cognitive, emotional, aesthetic, and moral). The importance of the four domains in influencing media literacy levels of individuals have been underscored by media scholars as earlier discussed in the paper.

Over-all media literacy levels

In order to ascertain the student-respondents’ over-all media literacy level, over-all weighted mean of responses in the four ML domains were obtained and the level was determined. The same was done to the data obtained from the teacher-raters. The scale range of scores was calculated by getting the range of the minimum and maximum response divided by the number of responses; the quotient was used as range interval, and thus the following: 1.00-1.74 (very low level), 1.75-2.49 (low level), 2.50-3.24 (high level), and 3.25-4.00 (very high level).
Table 1. Media literacy domain levels and over-all media literacy levels of student respondents according to the students and their teacher-raters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Student-respondents’ view</th>
<th>Teacher-raters’ view</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive domain</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional domain</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic domain</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral domain</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over-all media literacy level</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student-respondents’ viewed their over-all media literacy at high level ($\bar{X}=2.73$, SD.=0.39). Their ML levels in the four domains also fell under high levels, although there were slight discrepancies in the points of mean scores. The domain having the highest score was moral domain ($\bar{X}=2.86$, SD.=0.48), while the lowest was the aesthetic domain ($\bar{X}=2.57$, SD.=0.45). The teacher-raters viewed their students’ over-all media literacy at low level ($\bar{X}=2.35$, SD.=0.50). All the students’ ML domains were also rated low. Usually, cognitive skills are given more importance and practice in schools; it is, therefore, interesting to find the moral domain was viewed by the students their strongest domain. On the contrary, the teacher-raters viewed their students’ moral domain as their weakest ($\bar{X}=2.25$, SD.=0.53), and their emotional domain as their strongest ($\bar{X}=2.46$, SD.=0.50). In this section, some particular details useful to teachers and ML curriculum developers for the ML subject in the university, specifically the skills and knowledge requiring attention, were included. Below is a table of skills and knowledge (Table 2) where students scored low both in the view of the teacher-raters and the students as well as those items with apparently huge discrepancy. It is prudent to consider what the teacher-raters contributed as they had better knowledge and understanding of media literacy and had prior teaching contact with the students, meaning they were aware of their students’ academic performance, skills and knowledge.
Table 2. Skills and knowledge needing development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media skills and knowledge</th>
<th>Student-respondents’ view</th>
<th>Teacher-raters’ view</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Qualitative description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of media messages</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>Low level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grouping similar ideas and summarising</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>Low level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of media companies, production, and business (how they make money)</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>Low level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of media techniques (image manipulation, sound editing, computer graphics)</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>Low level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infer influence of media on values and behaviour</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>Low level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of immediate effects of media portrayal on audience</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>High level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of media messages influence on one’s judgment</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>High level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of media bias, fairness, and responsibilities of media producers</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>High level</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Difference in over-all ML levels in terms of gender and program**

Differences were investigated using independent sample t-test comparing two groups, and One-way ANOVA for four groups. The data obtained are summarized in the table below.
Table 3. Comparison of over-all ML levels across gender and program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item/Over-all</th>
<th>Student-respondents’ view</th>
<th>Teacher-raters’ view</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>p-value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ML</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EBC</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HRM</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TBM</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IBM</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The independent sample t-test of student-respondents showed that there was no significant difference in the over-all media literacy levels of students according to gender (p>.05). However, comparison of over-all media literacy levels across programs using One-way ANOVA revealed stark significant difference (p-value= 0.000). On the part of the teacher-raters, there was no significant difference of over-all ML levels according to program (p-value<0.05). On gender, there was significant difference but it should be noted that the p-value was at 0.049, indicating minimal discrepancy.

**Difference of ML levels in the four ML domains in terms of gender and program**

The same statistical tools used in the previous comparison were employed in finding significant differences between gender and among programs in the four ML domains. The comparison across gender showed no significant difference of student-respondents’ ML levels in their ML domains. Mean comparison with Independent samples t-test revealed no significant difference in mean scores (p values >.05). The teacher-raters echoed the same results for moral domain of both groups (p-values>0.05). But cognitive, emotional and aesthetic domains had a significant difference, with males as having stronger ML levels than females. It should be recalled that the largely unequal distribution of gender could have an influence on the result.
Grouped according to student-respondents’ program, the analysis of ML levels in four domains revealed clear significant difference (p-values < .05). Although the programmes had similar high ML levels in emotional and moral domains, there were discrepancies of levels in cognitive and aesthetic domains. As for the teacher-raters, there was no significant difference of ML levels in the four domains of students according to program (p-values > 0.05). The view of the students on their difference of ML domain levels might suggest that certain programs have more need of developing cognitive, aesthetic, or moral domain more than other majors. On the other hand, the teacher-raters view could suggest that all domains should be given the same weight or consideration when designing lessons to develop the ML levels of the students.

Discussion

This study developed a self-assessment questionnaire focusing on media skills and media knowledge as main components of media literacy and included concepts of four domains of media literacy, i.e. cognitive, emotional, aesthetic, and moral, which were argued to influence media literacy levels of individuals (Buckingham, 2005 cited by Literat, 2014, Schmidt, 2012, Sicharoen & Sicharoen, 2012). The results of the survey revealed that over-all media literacy level of student respondents was at high-level and that there was no variation of levels of ML domains. This is supported by the findings of Thienthaworn (2013) in his survey of undergraduate students’ social media literacy in Bangkok which showed their over-all ML at high level. Bunnag (2012) likewise found early teenagers having over-all media literacy at high levels. For this study, high level means students had adequate foundational knowledge structure about media content, industries and effects. Additionally, their media skills were developed enough to evaluate media messages they consume and were able to use them to achieve their personal media goals. On the other hand, results from teacher-raters indicated student-respondents having low level of media literacy. To the raters, the students lacked foundational knowledge structures, not adequately aware of their many media options, and had difficulty making well-informed decisions. Thus their evaluation and analysis can be faulty. The possible explanation of the difference of results could be the difference in understanding and knowledge about Media Literacy between the raters and the student-respondents. Nevertheless, this variation of views between the student-respondents
and the teacher-raters should be accounted for as they provide counter-balanced results which developers of ML curriculum and teachers teaching media literacy subject might have to weigh. Reviewing the ML levels of students according to domain indicated a need to look into their cognitive skills. Ranking their ML domains would display their cognitive domain being next to the lowest scoring domain and to their teacher-raters at low level. This is different to what was expected as it was found in the literature that cognitive skills were the most practiced and attended skills in schools, and therefore should be the domain having the highest score or level. This is crucial since media literacy emphasizes cognitive skills and are considered very important in assessing media literacy levels (Christ, 2004 cited by Bordac, 2009). It implies that cognitive skills of students should not be assumed to be well-developed.

For the skills requiring attention, skills of analysis of different media messages and immediate effects of media on audience, grouping and summarizing, and inferring influence of media on values were found inadequate. Additionally, there was lack of knowledge in media industries, production techniques, and media as business. Moreover, students had weak understanding of how media influence one’s judgment, media bias, fairness and responsibilities of media producers. If these are neglected, then students’ ability to make well-informed decisions and to be in control of their media habits, media goals, and to avoid unconscious media conditioning will be compromised.

The analysis of the over-all media literacy according to gender indicated no significant difference for student-respondents. On the other hand, analysis of teacher-raters’ responses indicated significant difference with males having higher over-all media literacy levels. This is contrary to Bunnag’s study (2012) wherein female samples had higher ML levels than males. Such conflicting findings are common in the literature regarding ML levels and gender, pointing to difference of context. In this study, the explanation could be the huge discrepancy in the gender distribution. It is possible that fewer but select males had better academic performance than most of their female counterparts. In comparing over-all ML levels across programmes, views of student-respondents showed significant difference with the EBC major having the highest score. This could be due to EBC students’ prior knowledge or background in analysing and interpreting language as well as their English language ability since students’ applying for the EBC Programme have to meet higher English
language qualifications than others. The teacher-raters indicated no significant difference according to programme, but they too scored the EBC major the highest. It could suggest that students of different programmes may need more help than others, and that the preparation of lessons may have to be modified according to more pressing or salient weaknesses of students within a particular programme.

The analysis of ML levels of students in four domains of media literacy according to gender showed no significant difference as viewed by the students but having significant difference for the teacher-raters. To the teacher-raters, males had better ML levels in cognitive, aesthetic and emotional domains. Males having better aesthetic and emotional levels is in conflict with the general findings articulated by Neurophysiologist Sabbatini (1997) on differences between male and female brains stating that women are better in aesthetic activities and emotional engagement than men. This could be an affirmation to the previously given explanation on why males in this study had higher over-all ML levels. In terms of programme, student-respondents reported a significant difference, with TBM scoring the lowest in all domains and EBC scoring the highest in all domains. The teacher-raters reported contrariwise, no significant difference. Nevertheless, it agreed with the students’ result that EBC performed better than other programmes (in three ML domains) and TBM less satisfactory (in two ML domains). What this could suggest is that all students of different programmes needed to be taught similar contents, skills and knowledge concerning the four ML domains but differing emphasis might be required, which would be according to what students’ in a certain programme lack.

Conclusion and Suggestion

Having analysed, ascertained and discussed the media literacy levels of the students on account of two viewpoints, it could be concluded that over-all the students’ cognitive domain still required more improvement and should not be taken for granted. Particularly, their media skills pertaining to analysis, infererencing or deduction, grouping and summarizing were low and inadequate. Additionally, the students’ understanding of media industries, media production, and media as a business was lacking. There was also lack in understanding of media bias, influence of media on one’s judgments and values as well as responsibilities and fairness of media producers. This could imply that the said skills and media knowledge
were not sufficiently cultivated or provided in their previous schooling. In this light, lecturers and curriculum developers might have to make certain their students have acceptable level of ability in their cognitive skills before introducing new media skills or more sophisticated skills they may want to include in their curriculum. Furthermore, emphasis on the nature of media companies, i.e. as profit-oriented, highly competitive, attention seeker, and have the most control of message production, would be helpful. Additionally, it is recommended that lecturers and curriculum developers should include topics on media effects and case studies (within the students’ context) to illustrate them. The differences of over-all ML levels across programmes (students’ view) and gender (raters’ view) in this study may need further investigation with the inclusion of other variables such as media habits and exposure, GPA, English proficiency level and Thai proficiency level to obtain more refined results as to what influences their differences. The differences in the levels of students’ ML domains might be due to their prior background in secondary school and in the environment they lived in which influenced their cognitive, affective, aesthetic, and moral skills or knowledge. It might also be due to their media habits and passive or active media engagement. A replication of this study, may consider the limitations of the present findings and incorporate the suggestions.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to thank Naresuan University for the funding, the useful comments provided by NU-IRB, the suggestions of experts that evaluated the questionnaire, and the help extended by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Arunee Onsawad and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Direk Teerapaton. Additionally, the authors express great appreciation to Naresuan University International College for its assistance and scheduling of the gathering of data.
References


