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Elise Sperling
elise.sperling@go.mnstate.edu

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News Media Literacy and Political Engagement in
High School Civics Education

A Project Presented to
The Graduate Faculty of
Minnesota State University Moorhead

By

Elise Sperling

In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science in
Curriculum and Instruction

Spring 2022

Moorhead, Minnesota

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ABSTRACT

The task of teaching civics to secondary students has been complicated by a constantly changing media environment and declining political involvement by young people. Youth are not equipped to interpret the vast amounts of information they consume on their phones and computers (Breakstone et al., 2018). At the same time, civics education has not prepared students to be engaged citizens in democracy (Vercellotti & Matto, 2016). Considering these factors, this study attempted to analyze whether teaching a news media literacy unit increased the political engagement levels of high school students, as some other studies have shown. Thirty high school students were surveyed using a single-subject, quantitative research design as a part of action research. Participants took the sixteen-question survey at the beginning of the research period, engaged in five lessons on news media literacy, and then answered the same survey questions a second time. The survey, originally developed by Ashley et al. (2017), measured political engagement using four categories: political knowledge, political trust, political activity, and political efficacy. The results of the study revealed that the news media literacy unit had the greatest impact on political trust, such as students' belief in the honesty of the government. There were slight increases in students' political knowledge and activity. The data showed that the news media literacy unit had a minor impact on the internal and external political efficacy of participants.

Keywords: news media literacy, political engagement, social studies education

DEDICATION

This action research is the culmination of multiple years of hard work during a global pandemic that upended our lives and our profession of teaching. I dedicate this project to my parents, Steve and Deanne, who have supported all my dreams and goals, including my travels abroad, undergraduate education, and teaching career. I am proud to be the first in my entire family to obtain a master's degree. I also dedicate this project to my partner, Eric, who is one of the most amazing educators I have ever met and inspires me to be a better person each day. His encouragement contributed greatly to this research project.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

High school social studies educators have been tasked with developing critical thinking skills that enable students to be intelligent and thoughtful citizens in society. The development of new forms of media over the past decade has changed the landscape for educators. Specifically, the inventions of the smartphone and social media, used widely by teenagers, have impacted civics education. High school students enter the classroom with more political exposure, making the teaching of civics as challenging and important as ever. Almost 100% of college students have engaged with the news in the past week, whether through a Facebook post, a conversation with a classmate, or a news app on their phone (Head et al., 2019). In the classroom at the high school level, social studies teachers have experienced firsthand how important news media literacy education will be in the future. Media literacy in the twenty-first century not only applies to the social studies classroom, but across all disciplines. At the same time, there has been growing concern regarding voting rates and political knowledge for young people. Voter turnout for people under thirty consistently lags far behind voting rates of older generations (Vercellotti & Matto, 2016). It is within this context that this study investigated the relationship between the teaching of news media literacy to high school students and its potential impact on political participation by youth. The landscape of politics and the media has developed quickly, and social studies teachers have a vital role to play in preparing students to interact with a changing world.

Brief Literature Review

Multiple studies established that news media literacy instruction enhances political engagement by youth (Ashley et al., 2017; Geers et. al, 2020; McDougall et al., 2015). However, most research on news media literacy focused on its impact on individuals and their knowledge

level, not on wider societal trends or civic engagement. Media literacy emerged as a broad focus of education, expecting students to evaluate, interpret, and analyze information at a higher level of thinking. At the time of this study, students were not prepared to analyze the substantial amounts of information they receive from their phone and computer (Breakstone et al., 2018). In addition, pre-service teachers (PSTs) emerging from undergraduate education programs were not prepared to integrate media literacy into their content area (Cherner & Curry, 2019; Schmeichel et al., 2018). For social studies educators in particular, news media literacy should prepare students to be able and willing to participate in democratic activities such as voting. Class activities such as reading news articles has improved political knowledge, especially when discussed at home with family members (Vercellotti & Matto, 2016). Research on current youth (under 18 years old) consumption of news, such as which sources are most used and how often they engage, has been limited. One consistent finding was that youth have growing amounts of distrust in traditional media outlets and see them as biased (Martinez-Costa et al., 2019).

Statement of the Problem

The first issue to be explored was whether high school students were prepared to analyze information from media sources, such as political news shared on social media. Previously, teachers used print media from traditional media companies like newspapers to instruct students. Increasingly students interacted with new forms of misinformation online like clickbait, sponsored content, satire, and conspiracy theories (Farmer, 2019). “Fake news” has become more common, and Sivek (2018) defined it as “manipulative, knowingly and purposefully inaccurate, news-like stories and images that are designed to appeal to users’ ideological stance, their emotions, and their desire to spread their perspective to others” (p. 125). The problem this

study examined was how educators could prepare students to engage intelligently with the news given this media context.

The second problem considered in this study was whether American youth are prepared to be engaged, informed citizens. Vercellotti & Matto (2016) argued that there has been a lack of preparedness for citizenship demonstrated by college students, which showed deficiencies in civics education at the high school level. Fewer and fewer young people were politically engaged overall, along with declining political knowledge levels (Van Camp & Baugh, 2016). When youth have high levels of internal and external political efficacy rates – such as belief in their ability to participate and confidence their voice will matter – they have been more likely to be politically engaged (Levy & Akiva, 2019). Civics educators have played a significant role in preparing each generation to be politically involved.

Purpose of the Study

As I prepared to teach civics to ninth graders in the fall of 2021, I struggled with how to best teach current events to students given the complicated political and media context. This study informed my teaching by providing data on students' likelihood of political engagement and feelings about politics overall. The findings of this study impacted how civics and news media literacy are taught. On a personal level, I was invested in the concept of how students get their news and engage politically given the prevalence of social media. It was common for students in my classroom to share knowledge they saw online without thinking critically about whether the information was true and what source it comes from. The study provided evidence regarding whether students have existing media literacy skills and discussed potential barriers to their participation in political activities.

Research Question

How did teaching a news media literacy unit impact the political engagement of high school students?

Definition of Variables

The following are the variables of study:

Independent Variable: The independent variable in the study was news media literacy instruction in the classroom. Media literacy has included the teaching of the author, audience, message, meaning, and credibility of a source; there has been emphasis on asking students to provide evidence using question prompts like “How do you know that?” and “What makes you say that?” (National Association for Media Literacy Education, 2007).

Dependent Variable: The dependent variable in the study was the political engagement levels of high school students. Political engagement was measured in four categories: political knowledge, activity, trust, and efficacy (Ashley et al., 2017).

Significance of the Study

Teaching high schoolers in civics class became more challenging as students engaged in more political discussions online. At the same time, young adults were not as politically engaged in activities like voting compared to previous generations. Eighty-six percent of adults got their news from a smartphone or tablet “often” or “sometimes” (Shearer, 2021). Shearer found that younger age groups (under 50 years old) relied solely on digital devices to access news, whereas older Americans got their news from both television and digital devices. Students’ interaction with political information online was likely to increase in the future and educators in all content would have to teach more media literacy in the classroom. On a broad level, social studies teachers have prepared young people to be citizens of the United States. This research was

important because it provided useful data about the impact of news media literacy lessons, not only for individual students' political engagement levels, but for the creation of effective civics classes in the United States as a whole.

Research Ethics

Permission and IRB Approval

To conduct this study, the researcher ensured all research involving human subjects was ethical (Wells, 2021). The researcher sought MSUM's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (See Appendix A). Likewise, authorization to conduct this study was sought from the school district where the research project took place.

Informed Consent

Protection of human subjects participating in research was assured. Participant minors were informed of the purpose of the study (See Appendix B). Participants were aware that this study was conducted as part of the researcher's master's degree program and that it benefitted their teaching practice. Informed consent means that the parents of participants have been fully informed of the purpose and procedures of the study for which consent is sought and that parents understand and agree, in writing, to their child's participation in the study (Wells, 2021). Confidentiality was protected through pseudonyms (e.g., Student 1) without the utilization of any identifying information. The choice to participate or withdraw at any time was outlined both verbally and in writing.

Limitations

The first limitation of the study was its small sample size. Thirty students were surveyed. This sample included two class periods of ninth-grade students who represent only part of the entire ninth grade. Another limitation was that students might not have cared about the results of

the study. Questions measuring their political knowledge were dependent on whether they cared to answer them honestly and with full effort. Because the survey was not graded, it is unknown how much motivation the students had to participate meaningfully. Finally, an important limitation was how the teaching of news media literacy lessons (the independent variable) were conducted. Teaching could have varied slightly between class periods. Students could have been impacted by who they were assigned to work with in groups or class discussion that was more in-depth in one class period compared to the other. The study took place during morning class periods and that could have influenced students' learning capabilities.

Conclusions

This introduction provided a brief overview of the research conducted on the connection between news media literacy instruction to high school students and their resulting political engagement levels. There have been existing gaps in the research regarding this issue, such as how youth consume their news and why news media literacy education could be beneficial. This chapter explained the problem that has existed, the significance of the study, and the purpose. The research ethics of the study were introduced, including an overview of IRB approval and informed consent procedures. The research question and variables were briefly defined. In the next chapter, a more in-depth literature review of news media literacy and political engagement by youth will be explained.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact a news media literacy unit might have on the political engagement levels of high school students. News media literacy has involved the skills of interpreting, evaluating, and analyzing a piece of information from the news. To be more specific, the National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) has identified the core analytical skills of media literacy to be questioning who the author is, the intended audience, the message, whether it is fact or opinion, and how credible the source is (2007). Students have had to navigate a digital landscape that has been challenging because of the creation of new tools such as social media and the proliferation of misinformation. This study researched political engagement by youth, such as interacting with the news, discussing current events with family or friends, and voting when able. Amidst concerns that youth have become increasingly uninterested in political engagement, it was worth studying if social studies educators can impact students through news literacy education.

The Relationship Between News Media Literacy and Political Engagement

There has been limited research on the connection between news media literacy and political engagement. Typically, educational researchers have focused on the benefits that news media literacy would have for an individual person and their knowledge and ability levels. Tully and Vraga (2018) argued that there should be more research on how news media literacy affects civic engagement so that wider societal impacts could be measured. Several studies established that teaching news media literacy does enhance civic engagement (Ashley et al., 2017; Geers et al., 2020; McDougall et al., 2015). Specifically, Ashley et al. (2017) found that teaching news media literacy increased students' current events knowledge and political efficacy but did not

impact levels of political activity. Geers et al. (2020) also found that engaging in news media literacy education resulted in higher levels of political efficacy, meaning that students had higher beliefs in their ability to analyze the news and engage with challenging topics. One example of a media literacy activity that had an impact on political engagement levels involved co-creating videos about the topic of “fake news.” Geers et al. (2020) compared students who created videos simulating “fake news” to students who only viewed educational materials about “fake news.” The researchers found that students who created videos had a much higher increase in their civic engagement levels.

A broad goal of education has been to provide an equal opportunity for all to succeed. There has been significant gap in news media literacy levels among people in society, resulting in a discrepancy between who participates in civic activities and who does not (Ashley et al., 2017). Geers et al. (2020) argued that “there is a gap between lower and higher educated citizens on civic competence” (p. 41). Research regarding the connection between news media literacy and political engagement levels has had implications for educational equity. As educators strive to ensure each student has access to a quality education across the United States, news media literacy has played a key role.

News Media Literacy

The development of new forms of media, such as social media, have changed the way people interact with each other and the world around them. Just one-in-ten Americans said social media had a positive impact on the way things had been going in the country, and 64% said social media had a mostly negative impact on the country (Auxier, 2020). Increased use of social media, along with engagement with partisan news channels by adults and children, forced educators to develop new ways of teaching media literacy. “Fake news” has been increasing in

frequency and has been defined as a “deliberate, publicly published disinformation/hoax/lie purported to be real news and published by established mass media or social media” (Farmer, 2019, p. 2). School librarians, for example, have expressed the need for a robust, effective media literacy curriculum (Farmer, 2019). Though media literacy can be integrated into any content area, there has been a particular emphasis on teaching news media literacy in social studies education. Social studies teachers have had the task of preparing students for successful participation in democracy. Because misinformation and “fake news” have continued to change the American political system (Manfra & Holmes, 2020), social studies teachers have had a renewed emphasis on news media literacy in recent years.

The Emerging Importance of Media Literacy

Due to increased use of technology in the classroom for teachers and students, media literacy was the subject of many studies by educational researchers. Media literacy education meant a shift from a factory model curriculum to a networked model curriculum, where technology was easily accessed and encouraged, students interacted with the world at any time, and collaboration was emphasized (Jolls, 2015). Jolls argued that education changed quickly due to technology and teachers should be provided adequate resources to provide a globalized education. Studies consistently found that young people were not prepared to interpret the vast amount of information they interact with on phones and computers (Breakstone et al., 2018). Students needed to have the skills to interpret, analyze, and evaluate information from various media sources. Teachers have had to guide students to understand who is behind a source, what evidence they are using, and what other sources say about the topic (Breakstone et al., 2018). Sivek (2018) argued that an equally important part of media literacy was teaching the role of emotion. Students should have studied how media messages could manipulate a person and

cause an emotional reaction, as well as develop skills like mindfulness that could be used to overcome emotional responses (Sivek, 2018).

Teacher Preparation and Skills

A common research question regarding media literacy has asked whether pre-service teachers (PSTs) were prepared to incorporate media literacy in their content area. There have been conflicting results based on the type and focus of studies. One study evaluated a 14-week course at a university in Turkey and found that PSTs were prepared to teach media literacy (Yavuz-Konokman, 2020). However, a study of a university in the Pacific Northwest found that PSTs were not prepared to teach media literacy, which applied to all content areas (Cherner & Curry, 2019). Similarly, Schmeichel et al. (2018) found “limited evidence of success” when examining PSTs’ ability to implement news media literacy across their entire time preparing to be a teacher (p. 100). Teachers found news media literacy difficult to implement because it did not align with standards and incorporating media literacy was extremely complex (Schmeichel et al., 2018).

There have been many strategies social studies educators could use to implement media literacy education in the classroom. The National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) had six key questions to ask when analyzing any type of source, whether print-based or from media (Nowell, 2019). Due to the prevalence of misinformation, social studies teachers have used practice exercises to identify “fake news” and question specific sources of information (Hodgin & Kahne, 2018; Manfra, 2020). Another approach was to utilize an action civics project where students applied what they learned about media literacy to an issue in their community (LeCompte et al., 2017). It has been critical that social studies teachers modeled how to engage with and analyze news sources. Tools teachers could utilize when teaching news literacy units

included the News Literacy Project and Newsela (Ramos, 2018). Social studies teachers often engaged in discussions about controversial topics in the classroom and taught news media literacy (LeCompte et al., 2018), but implementation of such topics remained uneven and varied.

Political Engagement

The purpose of having students involved in civic education has been to create well-educated and capable citizens who would be the next leaders in society. Students need to understand how the government works, ways to engage appropriately around political issues, and learn from the history of the United States. Political engagement has involved activities such as interacting with current events, having political discussions with family members, learning about government, and voting when able to do so. There have been declining levels of civic engagement and knowledge levels which, along with declining levels of political participation, meant that fewer and fewer young people are politically engaged (Van Camp & Baugh, 2016). A study conducted after the 2012 election cycle found that less than half of young Americans had voted and less than 10% of Americans between the ages of 18 and 24 were engaged in politics (Harvard Kennedy School Institute of Politics, n.d.). In a time of heightened political partisanship and the proliferation of new media sources, social studies teachers have had the unique challenge of shaping the next generation of leaders in a democratic society.

Civic Engagement Among Youth

Multiple studies found that youth become more politically involved when they approach voting age (Dias-Fonseca & Potter, 2016; Levy & Akiva, 2019). Teachers have had a vital role to play in encouraging civic engagement from students. A teacher's classroom practices directly impact the media literacy level and online civic engagement ability of students (Dias-Fonseca & Potter, 2016). A study by Vercellotti and Matto (2016) found that the most impactful civics

education activities involved having political discussions in the classroom and at home with family. Vercellotti and Matto discovered that when news articles from *Time Magazine* were discussed in class and then at home, the students most impacted by such teaching practices were in non-advanced courses and had parents with little political knowledge. Researchers have found it important to study what engages youth in political discussions and their attitudes related to politics. One key finding was that young people who have higher levels of political interest and political efficacy – which is confidence they can engage with civics – end up being more engaged politically (Levy & Akiva, 2019).

News Consumption by Youth

To understand why and how to teach news media literacy, educators should know where students get their news. Overall, there has been a gap in research regarding young people's news consumption and behavior regarding the news (Head et al., 2019). One key finding from multiple studies was that youth and young adults get most of their news from social media platforms (Evanson & Sponsel, 2019; Head et al., 2019). A popular app used by teenagers, TikTok, has become a force in politics; one TikTok influencer remarked that, "I do feel like TikTok is cable news for young people" (Lorenz, 2020).

A common misconception was that youth do not engage in reading the news or interact with current events. In contrast, Head et al. (2019) found that 99.7% of undergraduate college students they surveyed had interacted with the news during the past week. Millennials engaged with the news through "news snacking" which involved bits and pieces of news consumption whenever and wherever through the day (Martinez-Costa et al., 2019). Another finding was that young adults were more critical of traditional news outlets and saw them as biased (Martinez-Costa et al., 2019).

Theoretical Framework

This study used the constructivist paradigm to examine the impact of news media literacy education on political engagement levels. In the constructivist approach, there is no single truth and, therefore, reality needs to be interpreted (Patel, 2015). A quantitative approach was used to measure political engagement level resulting from instruction on news media literacy. Political engagement level was measured by analyzing a student's political knowledge, activity, trust, and efficacy (Ashley et al., 2017). Political knowledge, or current events knowledge, was measured by asking questions about common topics in the news, such as identifying an important political figure (Ashley et al., 2017, Geers et al., 2020). Measuring political activity included making a list of civic activities and asking whether a student was involved in them, such as attending a protest (Ashley et al., 2017). Political trust was measured by asking questions about whether a student believes politicians are dishonest or whether the government knows what they are doing (Ashley, et al., 2017). Finally, Ashley et al. (2017) has defined internal political efficacy as “the idea that a person has a sense that [they] have the ability to understand and participate in political activity” (p. 86). Geers et al. (2020) also measured political efficacy by asking questions about whether a student feels they are good at discussing politics. The constructivist theoretical framework was used to quantitatively measure political engagement within the four categories utilized by Ashley et al. (2017): political knowledge, activity, trust, and efficacy.

Research Question

How did teaching a news media literacy unit impact the political engagement of high school students?

Conclusions

This chapter provided an overview of existing literature on the topics of news media literacy and political engagement. The relationship between these two topics has not received a lot of research and many gaps in the research exist. News media literacy falls into the broader movement of media literacy that has become increasingly important in today's world of technology and information. Much of the literature on news literacy has examined whether teachers are prepared to incorporate effective lessons in their classrooms and the role that social studies educators should play. The topic of political engagement was examined through the lens of current levels of civic engagement by youth and news consumption habits in the younger generations. The next chapter outlines the methodology of this study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Introduction

Students in today's world live in a unique political and media environment that is constantly changing. High schoolers have been exposed to the news through social media, television, and interactions with others and research has shown that they are not prepared to interpret the vast amount of information they receive from phones and computers (Breakstone et al., 2018). Teachers in all content areas need to teach media literacy to students of all ages. In addition, civics education has not prepared students to be effectively engaged citizens (Vercellotti & Matto, 2016). As described in the literature review, there has been a lack of research on the connection between news media literacy and political engagement in youth. Though some studies had previously established that teaching news media literacy positively impacted political participation levels (Ashley et al., 2017; Geers et. al, 2020; McDougall et al., 2015), this research is important for high school teachers because it explores effective teaching methods to engage the next generation of leaders in society.

Research Question

How did teaching a news media literacy unit impact the political engagement of high school students?

Research Design

This research study approached the topic through the constructivist paradigm. The constructivist paradigm was chosen because it emphasizes experimentation as the way to gain knowledge on a certain topic. Constructivism argues that “people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences” (Adom et al., 2016). The participants in this study engaged in interactive lessons on

news media literacy and their understanding and learning was measured. Activities such as identifying an example of a “fake news” report gave students the opportunity to explore and experience knowledge instead of listening passively to a lecture. The findings of the study were analyzed using the constructivist framework which viewed the data as a way to interpret reality in high school social studies classrooms.

Quantitative research was used in this study because most previous research on the connection between news media literacy and political engagement had utilized this method. The tool used to measure the dependent variable – political engagement – was adapted from a quantitative survey found in Ashley et al. (2017) with permission from the authors (see Appendix C). Thus, the research conducted in this study had more validity because the survey tool had been used and tested previously by other researchers. Moreover, the specific type of quantitative research in this study was single-subject research. The researcher chose this method because a baseline set of data was collected (a pre-test), the intervention was taught (instruction on news media literacy), and then another set of data was collected (a post-test) to measure the impact of instruction. This allowed for reflection on the effectiveness of teaching news media literacy in the classroom and whether it made an impact on students or not.

Setting

The setting of the study was a medium-size school district in rural, northeastern Minnesota. The population of the town was 11,100 people at the time of the study. The school district had a lot of surrounding population living in rural areas, especially on lakefront property. The town is known for its history of forestry and paper production due to its placement along the Mississippi River. The largest industries in the town are education, healthcare, local and county

government, retail, and paper production. The culture within the school district, especially at the high school level, is focused on sports and the large, successful band program.

The school district, at the time of this study, consisted of three elementary schools, one middle school, one high school, one alternative school, and one K-12 school. This study focused on the high school, which had ninth-twelfth graders and a total student population of 1,350. Most of the students were white, making up 87% of the student population. In addition, 7% of students were American Indian or Alaska Native, 3.2% were two or more races, 1.5% were Hispanic, 0.7% were Black or African American, and 0.4% were Asian (Minnesota Department of Education, 2021). The free-and-reduced lunch rate of the high school was 23.6% (Minnesota Department of Education, 2021). Approximately 51.2% of the student population was male and 48.7% was female (Minnesota Department of Education, 2021). Other demographic details of the high school included 15.7% of students receiving special education services, 0.7% were homeless, and 0.2% were English language learners (Minnesota Department of Education, 2021). In 2020, the high school had a graduation rate of 95% and an average composite ACT score of 26 (Independent School District 318, n.d.).

Participants

The total number of participants was thirty students. They were selected because they were enrolled in their social studies class with the researcher at that time. The participants were in their social studies class during period one (8:25-9:10) and period two (9:15-10:05). All thirty students were in ninth grade. The participants were 53% male and 47% female. There were 9% of the participants who received special education services. Most of the participants lived in a two-parent homes (57%). Additionally, 3% lived in a foster home, 16% split time between multiple households, and 24% lived with a single parent.

Sampling

A purposive sample was conducted for this study. Because the students were enrolled in their social studies class, it provided a convenient sample to use for the study. The researcher chose to study all thirty students across two periods to gather as much data as possible. Some students in the class were not included in the sample because they were absent for multiple days during the five days of news media literacy instruction.

Instrumentation

The instrument used for this action research was a survey conducted using Google Forms. Participants took the survey at the beginning and end of the research period, which was five class periods. The instrumentation tool (see Appendix D) was originally created by Ashley et al. (2017) to measure political engagement levels after news media literacy instruction. The survey for this study was sixteen questions long, with four questions for each category of political engagement (political knowledge, activity, trust, and efficacy). Six questions were developed by this researcher to reflect current political knowledge based on current events in 2022. Ten questions were taken directly from the Ashley et al. (2017) study and permission was obtained by email from the authors of that study (see Appendix C). Four of the survey questions used a Likert scale and the other questions used a separate set of response options, but all were multiple-choice questions. The survey took approximately 10 minutes for students to complete.

Data Collection

The survey was administered twice – once at the beginning of the research period and once at the end. The survey was on Google Forms and students used their iPads to complete it. For both times the survey was administered, there was a QR code displayed on the projector

screen that brought the students to the survey. A digital survey was used so that the data was easily calculated into percentages and total response numbers.

Data Analysis

Data from the pre-test (before instruction on news media literacy) was compared to data from the post-test (after instruction on news media literacy). There were four sections of the survey that were analyzed in different ways. The first section of the survey, which was four questions on political knowledge, were analyzed based on how many correct answers there were by students. There were a percentage of students who got the question correct and a percentage of students who answered incorrectly. This measure of political knowledge was based on research conducted in Ashley et al. (2017) and was used to measure how much participants learned about current events in the world at the time. Questions five through twelve, which asked questions about political trust and activity, were multiple choice and have different answer options depending on the question. These were analyzed by percentages; for instance, calculating what percentage answered yes compared to no. The last four questions on the survey, which asked the students about internal and external political efficacy, were also analyzed by comparing percentages. These questions used a Likert scale with participants ranking from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” After calculating the percentages of each answer for each question, the data from the pre-test was compared to data from the post-test for all questions. The researcher was looking for changes that occurred from the pre-test to the post-test to analyze whether news media literacy may have impacted participants’ responses in any way. The key question of the study was whether five full lessons on news media literacy would change the students’ feelings about politics, such as their likelihood to participate in political activities or their trust in government.

Research Question and System Alignment

Table 3.1 provides a description of the alignment between the study research question and the methods used in this study to ensure that all variables of study have been accounted for.

Table 3.1***Research Question Alignment***

Research Question	Variables	Design	Instrument	Validity & Reliability	Technique	Source
How did teaching a news media literacy unit impact the political engagement of high school students?	The dependent variable in the study was the political engagement level demonstrated by students. The independent variable for the study was classroom instruction and lessons about news media literacy.	The study used single-subject quantitative research, conducted within the scope of action research. Students completed a pre-test, experienced instruction, and learning and then completed a post-test to measure the effect.	A sixteen-question survey measured students' political engagement levels and was given at the beginning and end of the research period (See Appendix D).	The survey tool was adapted from Ashley et al.'s (2017) study of news media literacy and political engagement levels. Instruction on news media literacy over five class periods was the same. The survey was given on the same day to all participants.	The survey was given on Google Forms before and after instruction on news media literacy. The percentages of each response to the survey were calculated. The pre-test was then compared to the post-test. The impact of instruction, if at all, could then be measured.	A total of thirty students in ninth grade. They ranged from 14 to 15 years old and were enrolled in a required social studies class.

Procedures

The action research occurred over the course of five class periods in spring 2022. Each class period was 45 minutes long. Leading up to the study, students were given a parent consent letter to bring home and return with a parent signature to participate in the study (See Appendix B). It was made clear that participation in the research is optional and will not be connected to any grades for the class. The first day of the research period consisted of taking the survey found in Appendix D, which took approximately 10 minutes. Next, students engaged in learning about current events around the world. Based on the research method in Vercellotti and Matto (2016), students read articles about current events topics in groups and rotated from station to station.

Then the articles were discussed as a class, and students were encouraged to discuss the political events at home with their family. The second day of instruction involved detailed examples of the types of news media bias and practice identifying types of bias. The third day of the study was news media literacy instruction on what “fake news” and misinformation were, including examples from current events in the year 2022. Students engaged with this information through notetaking, reading and class discussion. On the fourth day of instruction, students individually practiced identifying misinformation using “Checkology” from the News Literacy Project. The final day of the study included a lesson on how to analyze and interpret a news article. Students used key questions from the National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) to interpret the purpose, bias, and reliability of a news article, both on their own and as a full class. Nowell (2019) explained how to incorporate the key questions from NAMLE into civics lessons. Finally, students took the political engagement survey a second time, which took approximately 10 minutes.

Ethical Considerations

Protecting the well-being of students was a top priority in this research. First, it was made clear to students and families that participating in the survey was optional. This prevented any amount of added stress for students or pressure to answer a certain way on the survey. Second, the researcher attempted to create a safe learning environment where all students feel welcome, especially due to political and current events discussions that occurred. Class expectations were reviewed before the research study with reminders about how to appropriately discuss politics, such as refraining from judgement of others and respecting the opinions of others. Finally, the group work that took place in the research study was set up to allow for productive and respectful engagement among all members. The teacher took personalities and academic ability

into consideration so that pre-assigned groups made all members feel comfortable. It was made clear that students could communicate with the teacher at any time if there were concerns about working in a group with others.

Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter was to summarize how the action research was collected, interpreted, and analyzed. The setting of the study and its participants were explained, as well as why the research design was chosen. The procedures for the five-day research study were described, especially the political engagement survey that was given at the beginning and end of the research. The next chapter includes the results of the research study.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Introduction

This study considered the relationship between two problems in high school social studies classrooms today: the inability of students to effectively interpret the enormous amounts of media they consume and declining political involvement by youth. High school civics teachers have noticed that students easily fall victim to online misinformation, especially on social media. Within this context the researcher examined the relationship between news media literacy instruction and the political engagement of participants. When youth believe that their voice matters and feel confident in their ability to make change, they have been more likely to be politically active (Levy & Akiva, 2019). One goal of social studies education is to prepare students to be thoughtful and engaged citizens. This study attempted to determine what role news media literacy instruction could play in improving civic engagement.

Description of Data

At the beginning of a five-day unit on news media literacy, thirty participants took a sixteen-question, multiple-choice survey. All participants were enrolled in a required ninth-grade social studies class. Google Forms was used as the medium to conduct the survey. The survey had four parts: current events knowledge, political trust, political activity, and political efficacy (previously defined as confidence in one's ability to engage in civic activities). After the survey, five lessons on news media literacy were taught. Exercises on media bias and misinformation, how to analyze news articles for reliability, and important current events topics were utilized. At the end of the lessons, participants again took the sixteen-question survey with the same multiple-choice questions as before the unit.

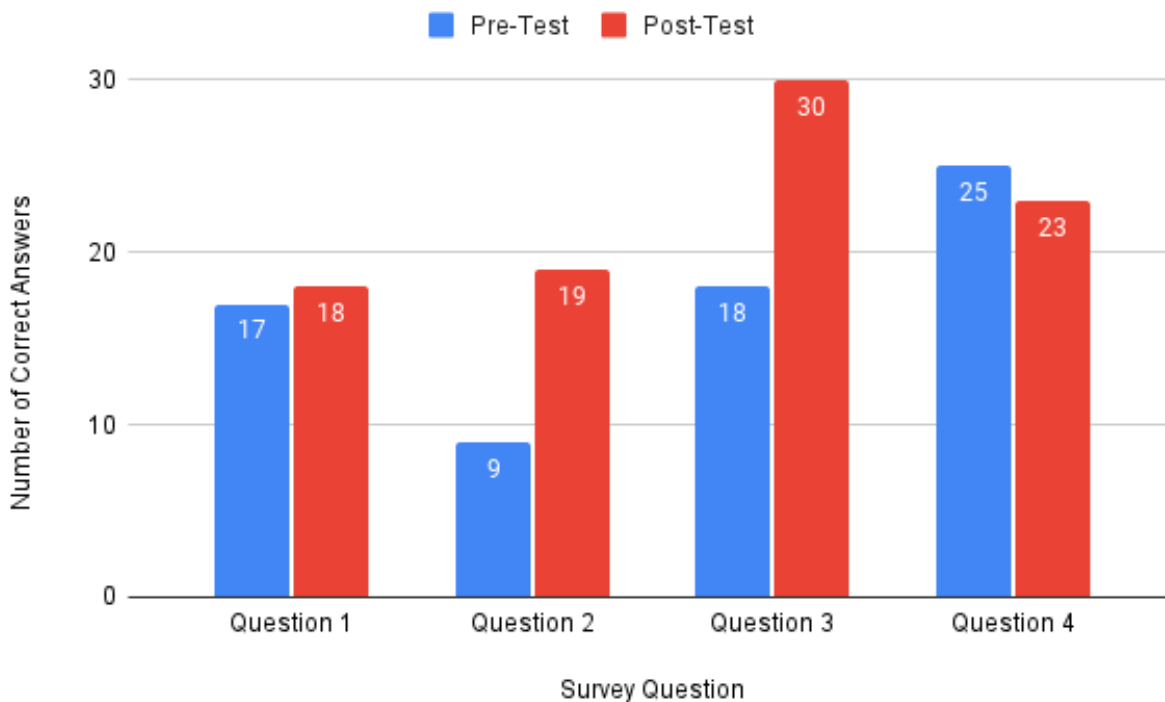
Results

RQ 1: How did teaching a news media literacy unit impact the political engagement of high school students?

The first part of the survey evaluated the current events knowledge of participants. Figure 4.1 shows the number of correct answers for the first four questions of the survey; participants either got the answer right or wrong based on what they learned during the lessons. Question 1 showed an increase of one correct answer from pre-test to post-test, Question 2 increased by ten from pre-test to post-test, and Question 3 had an increase of twelve from pre-test to post-test. Question 4 showed a decrease in the number of correct answers. Question 2 and Question 3 displayed the largest increase in current events knowledge for the participants.

Figure 4.1

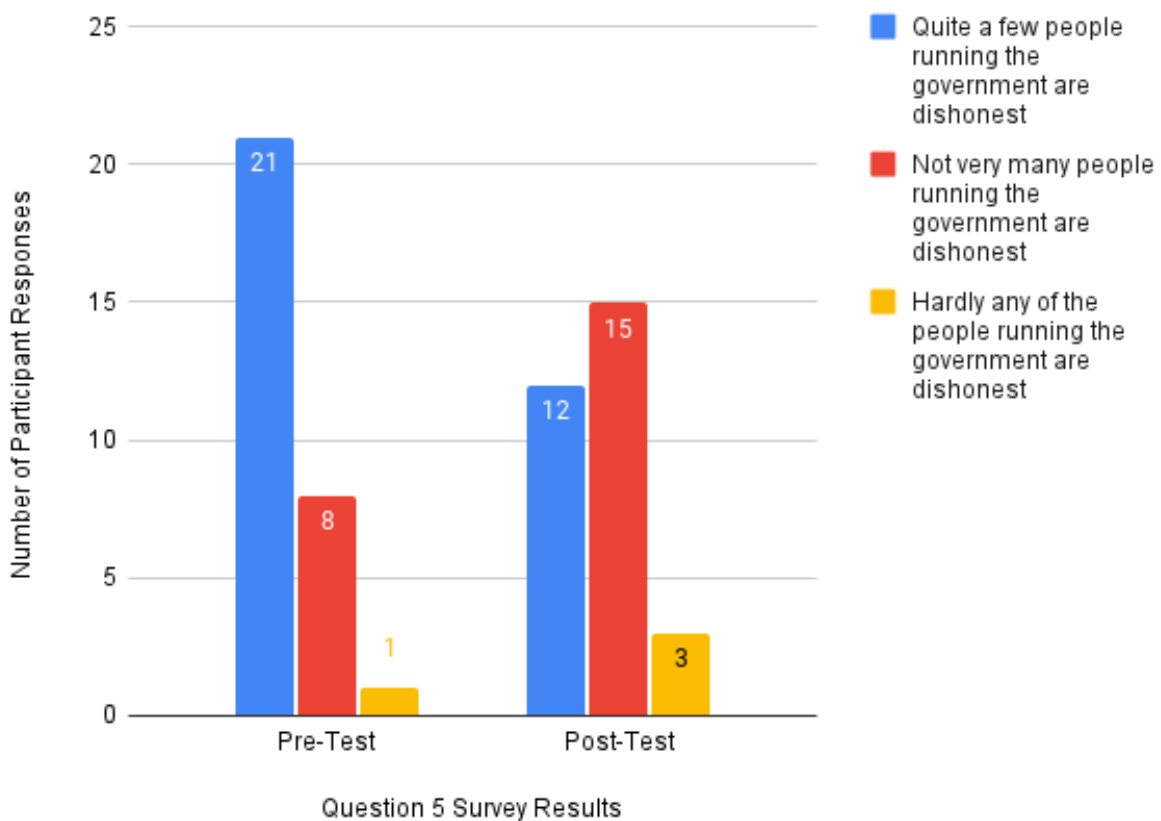
Participants' Current Events Knowledge from Pre-Test to Post-Test



The next part of the survey included data about participants' trust in the political system. Figure 4.2 compares pre-test and post-test answers for Question 5 which asked about whether people running the government are dishonest. Participant answers indicating that "quite a few people running the government are dishonest" decreased by nine from pre-test to post-test. Students choosing the answer "not very many people running the government are dishonest" increased from eight on the pre-test to fifteen on the post-test. Students choosing the answer "hardly any of the people running the government are dishonest" increased from one on the pre-test to three on the post-test.

Figure 4.2

Pre-Test and Post-Test Results for Survey Question 5



Another survey question about participants' political trust asked the extent to which the government can be trusted to do what is right. Figure 4.3 shows survey results for Question 6 on the pre-test and post-test. Participants' answers for trusting the government "most of the time"

went from twelve on the pre-test to sixteen on the post-test. Participants' answers for trusting the government "only some of the time" went from eighteen on the pre-test to fourteen on the post-test. There were zero answers for trusting the government "just about always" on both the pre-test and post-test.

Figure 4.3

Pre-Test and Post-Test Results for Survey Question 6

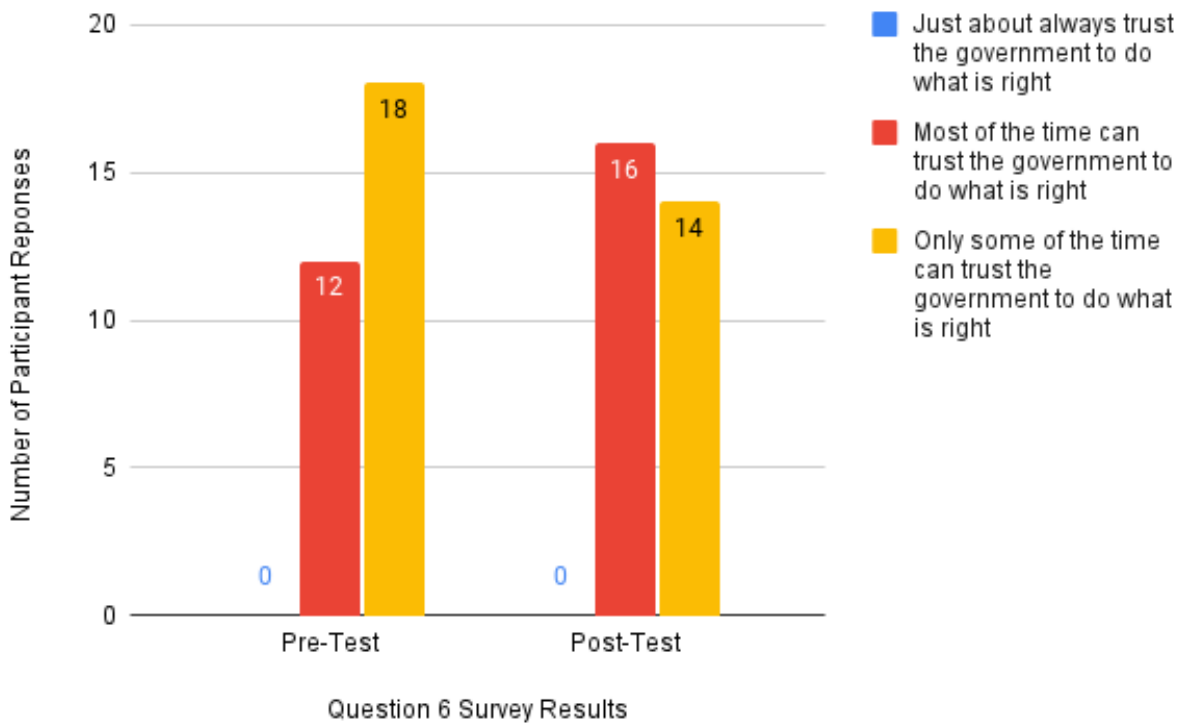


Table 4.1 compares pre-test and post-test data for the next section of the survey, which measured political activity. The question asked students to consider how often they think about what is going on in the government. From the pre-test to the post-test, students answering "most of the time" increased from 10% to 16.7% and "some of the time" increased from 26.7% to 40%. The number of responses for "only now and then" decreased from 50% to 30% and the responses for "hardly at all" stayed the same from pre-test to post-test.

Table 4.1

Pre-Test and Post-Test Results for Survey Question 9

Survey Question	Test	Most of the time	Some of the time	Only now and then	Hardly at all
Some people seem to think about what is going on in government most of the time whether there’s an election going on or not. Others are not that interested. Would you say you follow what is going on in government most of the time, some of the time, only now and then, or hardly at all?	Pre-Test	10%	26.7%	50%	13.3%
	Post-Test	16.7%	40%	30%	13.3%

Another measure of political activity is whether students are interested in voting. After the news media literacy unit, participant responses for Question 11 from the pre-test to post-test are shown in Figure 4.4. The response of “very likely to vote” decreased from 12 to 10, “likely to vote” decreased from 6 to 5, and “unlikely to vote” decreased from 6 to 1. The answer of “neutral” increased by 3 and “very unlikely to vote” increased by 5 from pre-test to post-test.

Figure 4.4

Pre-Test and Post-Test Results for Survey Question 11

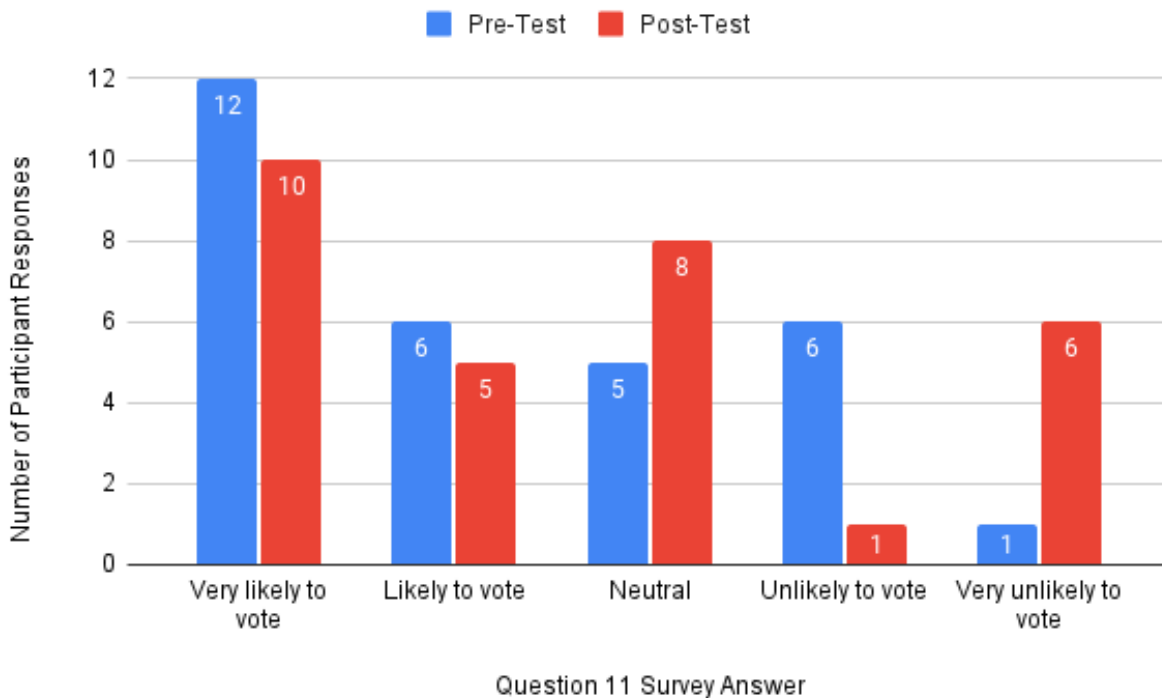
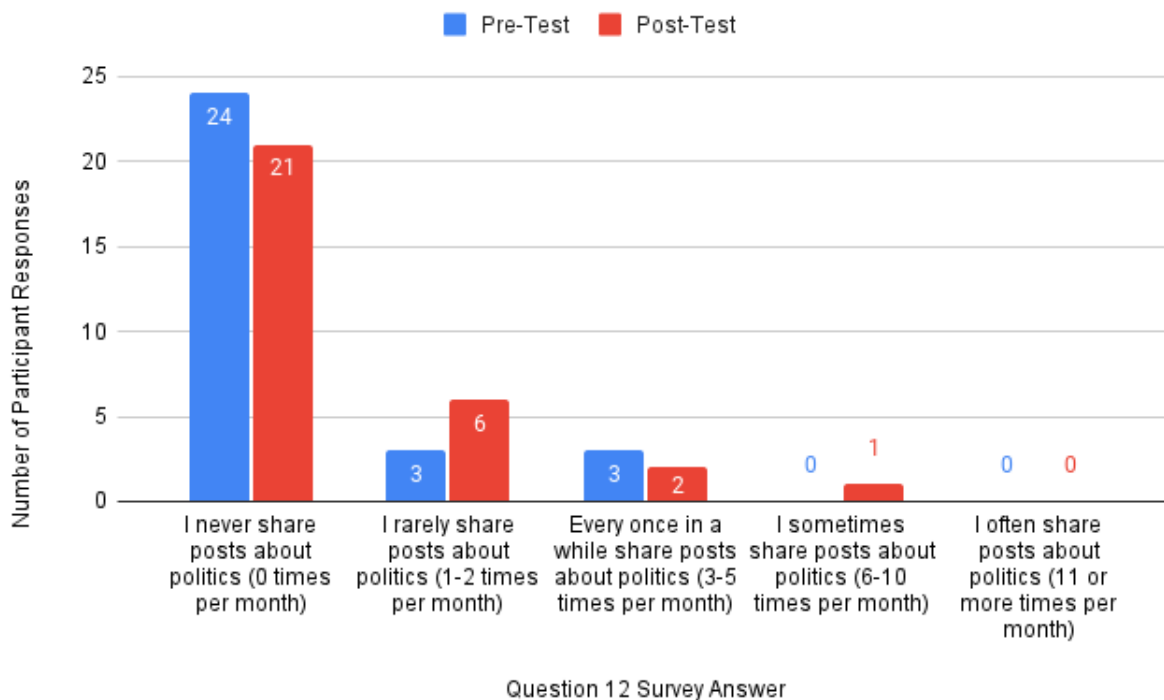


Figure 4.5 shows survey results for Question 12, which asked students how often they make or share posts about the news or politics on social media. For both the pre-test and post-test, there were zero answers for “often” and one response for “sometimes” on the post-test. The number of students who answered “never” went from 24 on the pre-test to 21 on the post-test. Figure 4.5 shows that the responses for “rarely” increased from 3 to 6 and students answering “every once in a while” went from 3 to 2 from pre-test to post-test.

Figure 4.5

Pre-Test and Post-Test Results for Survey Question 12



The last section of the sixteen-question survey in this study were questions about political efficacy, or a students’ confidence that they can understand civics and belief in the importance of their participation. Data from Table 4.2 shows that from the pre-test to the post-test, student answers for Question 14 remained similar, with “neutral” responses increasing from 30% to 40%. Answers to Question 15 also saw comparable results from pre-test to post-test, with an

increase in “agree” answers from 26.7% to 30% and a decrease in “disagree” answers from 6.7% to 3.3%. Question 16 had the most change from the pre-test to post-test, as shown in Table 4.2.

When asked, broadly, if a student feels they have any say in what the government does, students who answered “strongly agree” went from 20% to 0%, “agree” decreased from 23.3% to 16.7%, and “neutral” answers increased from 46.7% to 63.3%. For the same question, “disagree” responses on the post-test increased slightly to 16.7% and those answering “strongly disagree” on the post-test were 3.3%.

Table 4.2

Pre-Test and Post-Test Results for Internal and External Political Efficacy

Survey Question	Test	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Question 14 Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me cannot really understand what is going on.	Pre-Test	6.7%	26.7%	30%	26.7%	10%
	Post-Test	3.3%	26.7%	40%	23.3%	6.7%
Question 15 I do not think public officials care much what people like me think.	Pre-Test	6.7%	26.7%	60%	6.7%	0%
	Post-Test	6.7%	30%	56.7%	3.3%	3.3%
Question 16 People like me do not have any say about what the government does.	Pre-Test	20%	23.3%	46.7%	10%	0%
	Post-Test	0%	16.7%	63.3%	16.7%	3.3%

Data Analysis

The data showed mixed results on how participants’ political engagement levels were affected by news media literacy instruction. There were a few improvements in civic engagement for all categories, but some were insignificant. According to the data, the largest impact the news

media literacy unit had was on political trust. Figure 4.2 shows that many students who participated changed from thinking quite a few people in the government are dishonest to thinking that not many people in the government are dishonest. Question 6, as shown in Figure 4.3, showed an increase in students who said they can trust the government to do what is right “most of the time.” Data found in this study showed that overall trust in the political system could increase due to a news media literacy curriculum. Further research could help determine if lessons exposing students to the standards of quality journalism was a factor. Another finding that aligns with the literature was general youth distrust in institutions like the media or the government. Youth have prominent levels of distrust in the media (Martinez-Costa et al., 2019) which aligns with Figure 4.3 that shows no students answered that they can “just about always” trust the government to do what is right. More research on youth distrust in these institutions could analyze the role a news media literacy unit might play in increasing political trust.

There were mixed results when looking at whether news media literacy instruction impacted current events knowledge and political activity levels. As shown in Figure 4.1, student participants increased their political knowledge levels for two of the questions, but two other questions saw political knowledge stay similar or decrease. Regarding political activity, the data in Table 4.1 displayed an increase in the amount that think about what is going on in the government. These small increases in political knowledge and activity align with the findings of Ashley et al. (2017) who found that news media literacy instruction increased the political knowledge and activity levels of participants in their study. However, some survey questions showed that the news media literacy instruction did not change student interest in voting (see Figure 4.4) and had little effect on students who share or post about politics on social media (see Figure 4.5). It was particularly disappointing to see that the number of students interested in

voting did not change from pre-test to post-test. Voting is possibly the most important civic activity and a main goal of civics education. In summary, the categories of political knowledge and activity had mixed results after the news media literacy unit.

The biggest contradiction with existing literature on news media literacy and political engagement levels came in the category of internal and external political efficacy. The literature showed that news media literacy instruction increased political efficacy for participants (Ashley et. al, 2017; Geers et al., 2020). Research has shown that higher levels of belief in one's ability to understand politics (political efficacy) can result in higher levels of political involvement (Levy & Akiva, 2019). It was disappointing to see that the results of this study did not have any impact on political efficacy levels of participants. Table 4.2 shows almost no change for participants from pre-test to post-test when asked if they can understand what is going on with politics or if they think government officials care what they think. Therefore, the data reflected that five days of news media literacy instruction was not enough to impact the core beliefs students have about themselves and their abilities. Internal and external political efficacy would require more time to change. Other reasons for these results will be discussed further in the limitations section.

This research provided helpful data for high school social studies teachers to consider, especially teachers of civics. First, the data affirms the issue of low voter turnout for youth. The literature established that voter turnout for those under thirty is much lower than older generations (Vercellotti & Matto, 2016). This research showed that only fifteen out thirty students responded on the post-test that they are "very likely to vote" or "likely to vote," according to Figure 4.4. Second, the research supported the fact that general political involvement by younger age groups remains low. Harvard Kennedy School Institute of Politics (n.d.) found that fewer than 10% of those ages 18 to 24 were involved in politics. Data from

Table 4.1 supports the literature by showing that only 16.7% of students responded on the post-test that they think about what is going on in the government “most of the time.” A third key finding that is helpful for social studies teachers is that high school students do not seem to grasp how often they are engaging with politics on social media. Head et al. (2019) found that 100% of college students had engaged with the news in the past week, such as by reading posts on social media or discussing with others. Compare that to this research study which found that 27 of 30 students on the post-test said they “never” or “rarely” share about politics on social media (see Figure 4.5). The lesson for teachers in this case seemed to be that students may not think they are sharing or posting about politics on social media, but research in the literature says they are still engaging in politics by simply using smartphones and apps like Instagram and TikTok.

Limitations

A major limitation of this research is the lack of student motivation to actively participate in learning about news media literacy. Some of the student participants did not always fully engage during the five-lesson unit. Furthermore, some of the thirty participants did not take enough time to thoughtfully complete the post-test. The post-test was given at the end of a class period on a Friday morning, and the researcher suspects several students did not fully read the question or answered “neutral” because they wanted to finish the post-test quickly. The last section of the survey was four questions on political efficacy and the number of “neutral” responses was high. This limited the effectiveness of the research, especially for that category and potentially for others. Another limitation that occurred was student absences during the research period. Throughout the five days of lessons, some of the thirty participants were absent for one or two class periods. The researcher does not think there were any issues with the survey tool itself, just the overall observation that student motivation and absences affected the research.

Future research on this topic would need an increase in sample size and should provide more time to participants to thoughtfully complete the pre-test and post-test. If this study were to be replicated again, the researcher would consider ten days of news media literacy instruction instead of five. The data showed increases in political trust, insignificant increases in political knowledge and activity, and no change to political efficacy. Therefore, an increase in the amount and depth of instruction could have a more substantial impact on political engagement for high school students.

Conclusion

The study researched the relationship between news media literacy instruction and political engagement in a high school civics classroom. A five-day unit with thirty ninth-grade participants was conducted and the data was analyzed using a single-subject, quantitative research method. The data from the pre-test was compared directly to the post-test. Considering the limitations of the research, particularly inconsistent student involvement, this study found that teaching news media literacy had a positive impact on students' political trust. Furthermore, there were slight increases in current events knowledge and political activity, especially the number of students who think about what is going on in the government. The data showed there was no effect on political efficacy after the instruction on news media literacy. In summary, the data reflected that teaching news media literacy had a small to moderate impact on the political engagement level of students.

CHAPTER FIVE: ACTION PLAN AND PLAN FOR SHARING

Introduction

As I prepared to teach civics to ninth grade students for the first time, I was curious about how teenagers interact with politics on social media and the overall quality of their media literacy skills. As new forms of media come to dominate our world, research also shows lower voter turnout rates and political involvement among youth. It was within this context that I researched the connection between news media literacy and civic engagement. After conducting a five-day unit on news media literacy with thirty ninth-grade students and comparing pre-test data to post-test data, the results were mixed. Students' trust in the political system increased, as well as slight increases for current events knowledge and political activity; rates of internal and external political efficacy remained unchanged. This chapter includes reflections on my plans to incorporate what I learned into my teaching and plans to share these lessons with others.

Action Plan

This action research project has reiterated how critical news media literacy is for students in the twenty-first century. Even though the results were mixed and did not show a massive change in student attitudes towards politics, I still saw improvements such as increased trust in the honesty of government officials and more interest in paying attention to politics daily. Given the research that shows students are not prepared to interpret the vast amounts of information they consume from the media (Breakstone et al., 2018), I am now more convinced that every educator needs to teach media literacy. Moreover, this action research study showed that there is a dichotomy going on with youth and politics; on one hand, there is low youth voter turnout (Vercellotti & Matto, 2016) but at the same time, 100% of youth engage with politics on social media on a weekly basis (Head et al., 2019). This tells me that news media literacy is a critical

component of civics education because high school students need to have the ability to analyze political information and trust that their voice matters in our democracy.

In the future, I will continue to teach this media literacy unit during my civics course. I would change the instruction to include more depth and independent activities, as well as extending the unit to ten class periods. This study also showed me that I need to continue to improve my instruction of current events since political knowledge only increased for some of the topics covered. I want to collaborate more with colleagues in my school – especially social studies and English teachers – to learn more best practices for teaching media literacy. This type of news media literacy instruction, if included in all social studies classrooms and at all levels of education, would be a major shift in practice. The benefit of this shift for students, teachers and the wider community would include increased analytical skills and higher levels of political involvement for future generations.

Plan for Sharing

I plan to share this study with the other teachers in my social studies department and my colleagues who teach civics to ninth graders. At the district level, I will share my findings with administration and the curriculum director to assess what media literacy skills are currently taught and how to incorporate a broader news media literacy curriculum in our district. When the opportunity becomes available, I would like to present to the entire staff at my school during a professional development day and at a social studies conference in Minnesota. My goal would be to raise awareness about low political participation and the lack of media literacy skills, as well as the importance of a news media literacy curriculum for all levels of education. On a personal level, I plan to conduct more research involving pre-test and post-test comparisons in my classroom to measure the effectiveness of my teaching.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A: IRB Approval

Institutional Review Board



DATE: January 21, 2022

TO: Kristen Carlson, Principal Investigator
Elise Sperling, Co-investigator

FROM: Dr. Robert Nava, Chair
Minnesota State University Moorhead IRB

ACTION: APPROVED

PROJECT TITLE: [1864712-1] News Media Literacy and Political Engagement in High School Civics Education

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

APPROVAL DATE: January 21, 2022

EXPIRATION DATE:

REVIEW TYPE: Exempt Review

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Minnesota State University Moorhead IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Exempt Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to the Minnesota State University Moorhead IRB. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to the Minnesota State University Moorhead IRB.

This project has been determined to be a project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of .

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact the [Minnesota State University Moorhead IRB](#). Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been issued in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Minnesota State University Moorhead's records.

Appendix B: Informed Consent

January 2022

Grand Rapids High School
800 NW Confider Dr.
Grand Rapids, MN 55744

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am currently obtaining my master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction from Minnesota State University, Moorhead. Your child is being asked to participate in a study to determine whether teaching a unit on news media literacy affects students' political engagement levels. Your child was selected because they are in my social studies class. If you decide to allow your child to participate, please understand that your child will be asked to do the following and these are typical activities that pose no risk to your child.

1. Students will be participating in five lessons on news media literacy.
2. Students will be given a survey at the end of the five-lesson unit with a mix of questions that are multiple choice and short answer to determine their political engagement level.

Although GRHS Principal, Dr. Matthew Dass, has granted me his permission to conduct this study, I need to have parental consent to use this information in my final master's degree paper that is required as a part of my degree. If you sign this form, you are giving me consent to use the information that I gather.

All the information that I use will be confidential and no names will be used to identify students. Please know that your child can choose not to participate at any time without any consequences.

Feel free to ask any questions regarding this research study.

- You may contact me at GRHS by email at esperling@isd318.org or by phone at 218-327-5760 ext. 41560.
- You may contact my advisor at MSU-Moorhead, Dr. Kristen Carlson, by email at kristen.carlson@mnstate.edu

You are deciding whether or not to allow your child to participate. Your signature indicates you have read the above information and have decided to allow them to participate. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice after signing this form should you choose to discontinue participation in this study. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Printed Name of Student Participant

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

Appendix C: Permission from Ashley Et Al. (2017)**Permission: 2017 Ashley, Maksl, and Craft Political Engagement Survey**

Sperling, Elise

Tue 11/9/2021 6:20 PM

To: sethashley@boisestate.edu; amaksl@iu.edu; scraft@illinois.edu



Dr. Ashley, Dr. Maksl and Dr. Craft,

I am a graduate student at Minnesota State University (Moorhead) conducting Action Research for my master's degree in the spring of 2022. The dependent variable for my research is political engagement and the purpose of this email is to seek permission to use the survey found in your 2017 article. The specific article I am referring to is "News Media Literacy and Political Engagement: What's the Connection?" and I am looking to use questions from Appendix A, B, and C (current events knowledge, political activity, political trust, and political efficacy). The advisor for my research is kristen.carlson@mnstate.edu if you have other questions. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Elise Sperling



Seth Ashley <sethashley@boisestate.edu>

Mon 11/15/2021 4:03 PM

To: Sperling, Elise

Cc: amaksl@iu.edu; Stephanie Craft <scraft@illinois.edu>



Hi Elise,

Not sure if you heard back from anyone, but yes, it's fine to use our survey, and feel free to adapt it for your purposes. Note that only the news literacy measure is ours; the others are preexisting measures that we used. Hope that helps. Glad you are working on this!

SA

--
Seth Ashley, Ph.D.
Professor
Department of Communication
Boise State University
Author of [News Literacy and Democracy](#) (Routledge, 2020)

Appendix D: Instrumentation Tool

Political Engagement Level Survey (in Google Forms)

Part 1: Current Events Knowledge (Political Knowledge)

1. How does the United States get most of its electricity?
 - a. Natural gas
 - b. Wind
 - c. Nuclear
 - d. Coal
2. What percentage of student-athletes showed depressive-like symptoms due to the demand of their sport?
 - a. 5%
 - b. 10%
 - c. 25%
 - d. 40%
3. There is a debate surrounding which territory possibly becoming the 51st state in the US?
 - a. Guam
 - b. Cuba
 - c. Puerto Rico
 - d. Hawaii
4. What is the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) in North Korea?
 - a. A part of the capital city where visitors are allowed
 - b. An area between North and South Korea that is closely controlled
 - c. A location where Kim Jong Un meets with foreign leaders
 - d. The area on the northern border where visitors enter through Russia

Part 2: Political Trust

5. Do you think that quite a few of the people running the government are dishonest, not very many are, or do you think hardly any of them are dishonest?
 - a. Quite a few are dishonest
 - b. Not very many are dishonest
 - c. Hardly any of them are dishonest
6. How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington, D.C. to do what is right—just about always, most of the time, or only some of the time?
 - a. Just about always
 - b. Most of the time
 - c. Only some of the time
7. Do you feel that almost all the people running the government are smart people who usually know what they are doing, or do you think that quite a few of them don't seem to know what they are doing?
 - a. They usually know what they are doing
 - b. They don't seem to know what they are doing
8. Would you say the government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves or that it is run for the benefit of all the people?
 - a. Run by a few big interests looking out for themselves
 - b. Run for the benefit of all people

Part 3: Political Activity

9. Some people seem to think about what's going on in government most of the time whether there's an election going on or not. Others aren't that interested. Would you say you follow what's going on in government most of the time, some of the time, only now and then, or hardly at all?
 - a. Most of the time
 - b. Some of the time
 - c. Only now and then
 - d. Hardly at all
10. Did you take part in a political protest, march, or demonstration in the past two years?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
11. How likely are you to take part in voting when you turn 18?
 1. Very unlikely
 2. Unlikely
 3. Neutral
 4. Likely
 5. Very likely
12. How often do you make or share posts on social media about current events and politics?
 1. Never (*0 times per month*)
 2. Rarely (*1-2 times per month*)
 3. Every once in a while, (*3-5 times per month*)
 4. Sometimes (*6-10 times per month*)
 5. Often (*over 11 times per month*)

Part 4: Internal and External Political Efficacy

13. Voting is the only way people like me can have any say about how the government runs things.
 1. Strongly disagree
 2. Disagree
 3. Neutral
 4. Agree
 5. Strongly agree
14. Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on.
 1. Strongly disagree
 2. Disagree
 3. Neutral
 4. Agree
 5. Strongly agree
15. I don't think public officials care much what people like me think.
 1. Strongly disagree
 2. Disagree
 3. Neutral
 4. Agree
 5. Strongly agree
16. People like me don't have any say about what the government does.
 1. Strongly disagree
 2. Disagree
 3. Neutral
 4. Agree
 5. Strongly agree