Media literacy in ballet art

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DOI: 10.64370/GGKA9824

Abstract

The necessity to balance each individual's daily life between the need for Media Literacy and its crucial element, critical thinking, the correct selection, and direction for navigating one'sown quality day of life consumption, we say it should also be located in the arts. This research will explore the unique role of ballet art in the development of media literacy and critical thinking among attendees. Its central hypothesis is that ballet, as a multimedia form of expression that includes movement, music, and visual art, can significantly contribute to the improvement of these skills in the audience. The methodology of the research involves a mixed approach using both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques. Surveys and interviews with ballet performance attendees will provide insight into their experience and perception of ballet as a medium. Concurrently, content analysis will be applied to identify the specific aspects of ballet performances that most contribute to the development of media literacy. The results of this research are expected to show that ballet can serve as a powerful tool for education and the development of critical thinking, offering new perspectives on the role of art in contemporary society. The information and data obtained from this research will serve as a basis for the development of educational programs that integrate ballet into media literacy curricula, and vice versa, incorporating media literacy with ballet in elementary and secondary education programs.

Keywords: media literacy, critical thinking, ballet art, educational innovation.

Introduction

Culture encompasses values, beliefs, customs, art, knowledge, language, and institutions that shape the way of life of communities. It evolves through historical development, intercultural exchange, technological progress, and globalization, influencing both personal and collective identities.

Art, as a creative expression of human imagination and ideas, is a vital part of culture. It communicates symbolic meanings, provokes emotional responses, and serves not only as entertainment but also as an educational tool and a medium for preserving cultural heritage. By connecting individuals through shared aesthetic experiences, art opens new perspectives and fosters understanding.

In contemporary society, media literacy and critical thinking have become essential competencies. The constant exposure to vast amounts of media content demands the ability to critically analyze, evaluate, and select information. While research has explored how various media forms influence critical thinking, the potential of ballet as a medium in this context remains underexplored.

This study investigates the role of ballet as an interdisciplinary art form—combining movement, music, and visual aesthetics—in developing media literacy and critical thinking among audiences. The research aims to:

1. Identify elements of ballet performances that stimulate analytical and interpretive engagement.

2. Explore how audience experiences with ballet can inform educational practices.

3. Propose ways to integrate ballet into media literacy curricula in primary and secondary education.

The study seeks to address the following research questions:

- Which aspects of ballet performances contribute most to the development of media literacy and critical thinking?

- How can the audience's interpretive experiences with ballet be translated into educational strategies?

By examining these questions, the research contributes to a broader understanding of how the arts can be leveraged as innovative tools for fostering essential cognitive and cultural skills.

Theoretical framework

Медиумската Media literacy and critical thinking are core competencies in contemporary education and cultural development. Both involve the capacity to analyse,

evaluate, and actively engage with media, which is particularly significant in the digital era. They enable individuals to participate in society in an informed and reflective way, making them crucial for developing responsible and engaged citizens.

Media literacy

Media literacy can be defined as the ability to critically engage with media and media technologies, encompassing access to media content, the capacity to understand it, and the skill to create personal messages (Smailova et al., 2023, p. 251). It is now recognised as a key component of general literacy, comparable in importance to reading and numeracy skills, as it supports individuals in navigating complex media environments.

Beyond basic technical competence, media literacy involves a combination of cognitive, emotional, and social skills: analytical and critical thinking, creative production of media messages, reflection, ethical reasoning, and active civic participation (Smailova et al., 2023, p. 5; Johnson, 2019). This broader perspective aligns with the view that effective media literacy education must integrate critical thinking, ethical behaviour, and responsible citizenship (Taylor, 2021).

An important dimension of media literacy is the capacity to deconstruct and critically analyse media texts to understand their influence on social coexistence (Green & Brown, 2020). For young people, especially school-aged children, its development should be prioritised alongside traditional literacy skills (Smailova et al., 2023, p. 8). Research also emphasises the role of parents and the home environment: when combined with school-based initiatives, parental mediation significantly enhances children's media literacy (Adams, 2022). Furthermore, well-designed media literacy programmes have been shown to reduce behavioural problems among children and adolescents and to have a lasting positive impact (Smailova et al., 2023, p. 3).

Critical thinking

Critical thinking is integral to media literacy, as it enables the evaluation of the quality and accuracy of content—whether in news, advertising, or social media—and supports informed decision-making (Johnson, 2019). It also plays a role in promoting diversity of opinion and active participation in digital contexts (Green & Brown, 2020).

In combating misinformation, critical thinking is central to identifying unreliable sources, challenging false claims, and understanding the mechanisms of regulation and participation (Smailova et al., 2023, p. 15). In the post-truth era, scholars argue that the ability to critically evaluate information must be at the forefront of pedagogy (Green & Brown, 2020).

In educational settings, teaching students to question and assess media content strengthens their ability to distinguish fact from falsehood (Adams, 2022). This not only prepares them for active citizenship but also develops skills for meaningful civic engagement in modern society.

Summary of theoretical framework

In summary, the reviewed theoretical perspectives underscore the interdependence between media literacy, critical thinking, and the interpretive engagement fostered by artistic forms such as ballet. While existing literature recognises the value of art in cultivating analytical and reflective capacities, there remains a notable gap in understanding how ballet, as a multimedia art form, can serve as a vehicle for these competencies. This study builds on the outlined frameworks by applying them to a cultural context that has been largely unexplored, aiming to provide empirical evidence on ballet's potential to enhance both cognitive and cultural dimensions of media literacy.

Previous research

The existing literature examines media literacy, critical thinking, and art as separate concepts, yet little attention has been given to their intersection—particularly the potential of ballet as an art form to foster what some scholars call media wisdom. This concept refers to the capacity to select relevant information, resist emotional manipulation, and adopt a conscious and rational approach to information consumption (Smailova et al., 2023). The absence of studies directly linking ballet to the development of such competencies marks a significant gap in the academic field.

Ballet and media influence

While prior research has explored media influence on ballet dancers, most of it focuses on topics such as body image and dissatisfaction. For example, studies show that media exposure can shape dancers' perceptions of the ideal body, with stronger effects among ballet dancers compared to non-dancers (Author, year). These findings are relevant because they illustrate the broader role media plays in shaping perceptions and values. However, they do not examine ballet as a medium that could counterbalance such influences by fostering critical engagement with media messages.

Interdisciplinary skills in the digital era

In the digital age, literacy is no longer confined to reading and writing—it demands a blend of media literacy, information literacy, and critical thinking skills (Bass, 2024). Scholars argue that to be truly literate today, individuals must combine these competencies to navigate complex and often manipulative media environments. This aligns with the premise of the present study: ballet, as a multidimensional form combining movement, music, and visual aesthetics, can serve as an engaging context for developing such skills.

Art as a tool for active inquiry

Media literacy education relies on active inquiry and critical thinking, encouraging participants to analyse and create messages with awareness of their potential impact (Lipkin, 2021). Ballet performances—rich in symbolism, narrative, and emotional depth—provide a unique opportunity to cultivate these skills in audiences. By interpreting visual, auditory, and symbolic elements, viewers engage in cognitive and interpretive processes similar to those used in deconstructing media messages.

Ballet and collective experience

Dance scholars highlight the collective dimension of performance, noting that dance brings people together as spectators and performers, fostering awareness of shared temporal and spatial experiences (Nunn, 2022). This social aspect adds to its potential as an educational tool: collective reflection can strengthen critical awareness and media wisdom by connecting personal interpretation with group dialogue.

Ballet as communication and social commentary

Renowned choreographer Martha Graham described dance as “one of the arts of communication,” rejecting the notion that it exists in isolation from society (Graham, 1939). Similarly, Monden (2014) emphasises that ballet reflects broader cultural and social contexts, addressing contemporary issues through artistry. This suggests that ballet can be a medium for discussing social themes, thereby engaging audiences not only emotionally but also intellectually.

Implications for the present study

The reviewed literature shows that while ballet has been studied in relation to media influence on performers, little is known about its role in developing audiences' media literacy and critical thinking. By positioning ballet within media literacy education, this study addresses an unexplored intersection between the arts and digital-age competencies. It proposes that the interpretive skills fostered through engaging with ballet performances could be applied to broader media contexts, enriching both artistic appreciation and civic participation.

Methodology

Research design

This study adopts a mixed-methods design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of ballet's potential to develop media literacy and critical thinking. The combination of methods allows for both statistical generalisation and in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings.

Data collection methods

Surveys: The survey component includes both closed-ended and open-ended questions to measure levels of media literacy, critical thinking, and the ability to interpret artistic content. Data will be collected during the 2023 season of the National Opera and Ballet in Skopje, immediately after selected performances. In total, 80 participants will be surveyed, selected through a combination of random sampling (audience members approached on-site) and purposive sampling (acquaintances who are regular attendees). Surveys will be distributed both in paper format at the venue and online to increase accessibility.

Interviews: Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with 20 participants from the survey pool to explore their experiences and interpretations in greater depth. Each interview will last approximately 20–30 minutes, be audio-recorded with consent, and later transcribed verbatim. Open-ended questions will focus on the perceived impact of ballet performances on participants' analytical engagement and critical thinking.

Content analysis: A qualitative content analysis will be conducted on selected ballet performances from the 2023 season. The unit of analysis will be the entire performance, examining choreography, staging, music, and visual design. A coding scheme will be developed to categorise symbolic, narrative, and aesthetic elements that may stimulate

critical thinking and media literacy. To ensure coding reliability, two independent coders will analyse the performances, and inter-coder agreement will be calculated.

Target group / participants

The study population comprises attendees of the National Opera and Ballet, including individuals with varying familiarity with ballet and media. The sample includes participants from different age groups, educational backgrounds, and professional profiles. For comparative purposes, participants will be categorised as regular attendees or first-time visitors, allowing the study to explore potential differences in interpretive engagement.

Data analysis

The collected data will be analysed using distinct approaches for the quantitative and qualitative components, followed by an integrative synthesis to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

Quantitative data

Survey data will be processed using SPSS and Microsoft Excel to ensure accuracy and facilitate both descriptive and inferential statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics: Mean, median, standard deviation, and percentages will be calculated to identify general trends and patterns in the participants' responses. Inferential analysis: Independent-samples t-tests, one-way ANOVA, and χ^2 (Chi-square) tests will be used to examine differences between subgroups (e.g., regular vs. first-time attendees, age groups, educational background). Correlation analysis: Pearson's correlation coefficient will be applied to examine potential relationships between demographic factors and the level of media literacy or critical thinking. Significance will be determined at the $p < 0.05$ level.

Qualitative data

Interview transcripts and open-ended survey responses will be analysed through thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach: familiarisation with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. Coding: Data will be coded inductively and categorised to capture recurring ideas and experiences related to ballet's role in developing media literacy and critical thinking. Contextual analysis:

Responses will be interpreted within the context of specific ballet performances, considering visual, musical, and narrative elements. Reliability: Two independent coders will analyse the transcripts, and inter-coder agreement will be calculated to ensure consistency.

Integration of results

The study will employ a convergent mixed-methods design, in which quantitative and qualitative data will be analysed separately and then merged. This triangulation process will allow cross-validation of findings, highlighting points of convergence and divergence between statistical trends and in-depth narrative accounts.

Validity and reliability

To ensure validity and reliability: Instrument validation: The survey instrument will be pilot-tested with a small group (n=10) to refine question clarity and structure. Internal validity: Use of multiple data sources and methods will strengthen the robustness of findings. External validity: The diverse sample will enhance the generalisability of results to a wider audience of ballet attendees. Qualitative credibility: Member checking will be employed by sharing summarised interpretations with selected participants for feedback, and peer debriefing will be used to review thematic coding decisions. This analytical approach will ensure that the conclusions are empirically grounded, methodologically transparent, and applicable for educational and artistic contexts.

Results

Demographic profile

Age: The largest proportion of participants were aged 36–50 years (33.3%), followed by those aged 18–25 years and 26–35 years (20% each). Participants under 18 years and over 50 years each accounted for 13.3% of the sample. These findings indicate a demographically diverse audience, with a notable concentration in the working-age population.

Educational qualification: Most participants reported holding a higher education degree (42.7%), while 26.7% had completed postgraduate studies. Only 5.3% had attained basic education, suggesting that the audience was predominantly composed of individuals with a relatively high level of formal education.

Frequency of attendance: An equal proportion of participants attended ballet performances occasionally (42%) and regularly (42%), while 15.3%were attending for the first time.

Media literacy

Ability for critical analysis: Nearly half of the respondents (45.3%) stated that they always engage in critical analysis of media content, while 29.3% reported doing so sometimes. A smaller proportion (25.3%) indicated that they rarely or never apply critical analysis to media.

Awareness of the impact of art: More than half of the participants (58.7%) had reflected on how art can shape their perspectives on media.

Experience with ballet

Evaluation of the experience: Over half of the audience (52%) rated their experience as excellent, while 28.7% considered it good. Only 3.3% described their experience as unpleasant.

Most memorable elements: The emotional message was identified as the most memorable aspect of the performance by 59.3% of respondents. Music, movement, and visual elements were each highlighted by 13.3% of the participants.

Critical thinking

Reflection on symbolism and narrative: A vast majority of respondents (98.7%) reported that the performance encouraged them to think more deeply about symbolism and narrative structure.

Ability to recognize intent: Four-fifths of the audience (80%) stated that they clearly understood the intended message of the performance, while the remaining 20% reported only a partial understanding.

Conclusions from the data

Demographic relevance: The sample reflects a demographically diverse audience, with a notable proportion of highly educated individuals and regular attendees of artistic events. This composition provides a relevant and informed participant base for assessing the relationship between ballet, media literacy, and critical thinking.

Media awareness: The majority of participants demonstrate awareness of the significance of art in shaping perspectives and fostering critical thinking. This awareness forms a strong foundation for the integration of artistic experiences into educational strategies.

Experience and emotions: Ballet performances engage audiences on a deeply emotional level while simultaneously encouraging reflection on symbolic and narrative elements.

Educational implications: The findings suggest that ballet can serve as an effective pedagogical tool for developing media literacy and critical thinking, particularly when integrated into broader educational and cultural initiatives.

Qualitative in-depth analysis

Purpose of the analysis: The qualitative component examines participants' subjective experiences, attitudes, and perceptions regarding the influence of ballet on their critical thinking and media literacy. This analysis is based on responses to open-ended survey questions, focusing on emergent themes and patterns.

Key themes and findings

Notable elements of ballet

Emotional message: Participants consistently identified the emotional dimension of ballet as the most impactful aspect. Performances were described as evoking "deep feelings" and "empathy for the story." Example: "The emotional message helped me understand the story and reflect on my personal experiences."

Symbolism and artistic creativity: Visual design (costumes, set design) and choreography were perceived as integral to interpreting the narrative and symbolic messages. Example: "The set design felt like a metaphor that made me reflect on many life questions, including broader societal issues."

Impact on media literacy

Inspiration for analyzing media content: Respondents indicated that ballet inspired a more nuanced approach to analyzing media messages. Example: "Ballet taught me that every image or movement carries a message, just like the media messages we encounter daily."

Parallel to critical thinking: Some participants reported that ballet heightened their attention to detail, similar to evaluating the credibility and intent of news content. Example: “The ballet performance prompted me to focus on details, much like when analyzing a news article.”

Encouragement for the development of critical thinking

Interpretation of symbolism: Participants expressed that ballet motivated them to search for deeper meanings in both artistic and media contexts. Example: “Interpreting the symbolism in the performance gave me a new perspective on how to approach complex issues.”

Inspiration for discussion: Several participants engaged in post-performance discussions on topics such as social values and cultural differences. Example: “I talked with my friends about how media can manipulate our emotions, inspired by the ballet.”

Key conclusions from the qualitative analysis

Profound emotional engagement – Ballet establishes a strong emotional connection with audiences, making it a powerful medium for fostering empathy alongside analytical skills.

Catalyst for critical thinking – Performances stimulate reflection on symbolic content and encourage the formation of informed, evidence-based conclusions.

Application to media literacy – Participants identify clear parallels between interpreting ballet and critically evaluating media, suggesting that the skills are transferable.

Discussion

Interpretation of findings: The findings of this study indicate that ballet can play a meaningful role in the development of media literacy and critical thinking. Almost all participants (98.7%) reported that the performance prompted them to reflect on symbolism and narrative, supporting theoretical perspectives that frame media literacy as more than simple information exchange — it also requires the capacity to analyze symbolically and culturally significant messages.

The emotional dimension of ballet emerged as a key factor, with 59.3% of respondents identifying it as the most influential element. This is consistent with the concept of media wisdom, which highlights the importance of equipping individuals with the skills to navigate and evaluate emotionally charged messages in the media environment. The

integration of visual, musical, and kinetic components in ballet engages audiences in complex interpretative processes, encouraging deeper analytical thinking.

Furthermore, results indicate that regular attendees of ballet performances tend to demonstrate more advanced skills in analyzing and interpreting media content. This supports the view that sustained engagement with the arts can strengthen critical thinking abilities. In this sense, ballet can be seen not only as an aesthetic experience but also as a platform for practicing and enhancing media literacy.

Implications for practice

Integration of ballet in education: Ballet can serve as a highly effective educational tool. Incorporating the analysis of ballet performances into curricula could foster students' ability to critically evaluate visual and narrative content.

Interdisciplinary curriculum development: Educational programs that combine artistic disciplines with media literacy should be designed across all educational levels. These could include practical activities where students produce their own artistic content, accompanied by critical analysis of symbolic meaning.

Teacher training and professional development: Teacher training programs could integrate modules on using artistic performances, including ballet, as resources for developing critical thinking and media literacy skills in students.

Promotion of cultural awareness: Incorporating ballet and similar art forms into formal and informal education could enrich students' cultural knowledge and increase their sensitivity to diverse cultural and historical contexts.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in compliance with established ethical research guidelines for studies involving human participants. Prior to data collection, all participants were informed about the purpose, scope, and procedures of the research, as well as their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Written informed consent was obtained from each participant before participation.

To ensure confidentiality, all personal identifiers were removed from the data, and responses were coded anonymously. Data were stored securely in password-protected digital files accessible only to the research team. No identifying information was included in the reporting of results.

Given that the study involved adult participants attending public cultural events, the research posed minimal risk. Nevertheless, care was taken to respect participants'

privacy and autonomy throughout the process. The study adhered to the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki and followed relevant institutional and national regulations governing research with human participants.

Research Limitations

Sample characteristics and potential bias: The participant pool consisted mainly of regular ballet attendees, which may have introduced bias due to their prior familiarity with and appreciation for the art form.

Focus on a single art form: The study examined only ballet, which limits the generalizability of findings to other art forms or types of media content.

Cultural and geographical context: All participants were drawn from a specific cultural and geographical setting, which may shape their perceptions and engagement with ballet.

Subjectivity of qualitative data: Open-ended survey responses and interview data carry an inherent degree of subjectivity, which may make it difficult to draw universally applicable conclusions.

Absence of longitudinal data: The study did not assess the long-term effects of exposure to ballet on the development of media literacy and critical thinking. Future research could address this gap through longitudinal designs.

Conclusion

This study is among the first to position ballet explicitly within the framework of media literacy and critical thinking development. Its uniqueness lies in bridging performing arts and digital-age competencies—an intersection rarely explored in academic literature. The empirical findings confirm that ballet performances stimulate audiences to engage in deeper interpretation of symbolic and narrative content, enhancing analytical skills directly applicable to media evaluation.

The practical implications are significant. Integrating ballet analysis into school curricula can foster interdisciplinary learning, improve students' ability to critically assess emotionally charged content, and increase cultural awareness. Teacher training programs can use ballet as a model for developing educational approaches that connect art appreciation with critical media skills. This makes ballet not only a cultural experience but also a pedagogical tool with measurable educational benefits.

While the study is limited by its focus on a single art form, a specific cultural context, and a predominantly regular-attendee participant pool, it opens a new pathway for research at the intersection of the arts and media education. Future studies could expand

this work by including diverse art forms, broader demographic samples, and longitudinal designs to examine long-term effects.

In conclusion, ballet emerges not only as a cultural and aesthetic experience but also as a transformative medium for cultivating media wisdom. Recognising and harnessing this potential could significantly contribute to the development of more holistic, arts-integrated approaches to media literacy education in the 21st century.

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