

## **Teacher Agency in Media Literacy: A Qualitative Study of Bolivian Teachers and Their Room to Manoeuvre**

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**Abstract :** Critical media literacy teaches people to think analytically about the information they receive through the media. It is heavily influenced by Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy and the necessity of becoming conscious of one's reality in order to transform it. This qualitative research examines the case of Bolivia, which experienced dramatic political change after the first indigenous president, Evo Morales, was elected in 2006. In 2010, the government passed an education reform — the Avelino Siñani Elizardo Pérez (ASEP) —that draws heavily on decolonial thought and the Freirean notion of critical consciousness. The extent to which these theories were implemented in practice is evaluated in context of a media literacy project, run by an NGO, that trains secondary school teachers from public schools across Bolivia through yearly workshops ranging from producing media to identifying fake news. This context is examined against the backdrop of the highly contested general elections in October 2019. While there is plenty of literature that outlines the benefits of teaching media literacy in the classroom and different ways to apply it, little research has been done analysing implementation at an institutional level and how to best enable teachers who are motivated to teach the subject. Through semi-structured interviews, document analysis and naturalistic observations, this study aims to identify the struggles faced by teachers who are dedicated to teaching critical media literacy in their classrooms and how they navigate educational spaces while being subject to a demanding national curriculum that supposedly also seeks to promote critical thinking. The interplay between the aspirations of teachers and NGOs in contrast to the top-down discourse and policy of governmental institutions provides for a very enlightening case. By exploring these institutional, cultural, sociopolitical and economic barriers the teachers face, this research attempts to contribute to the debate in media literacy theories concerned with implementing the practice in schools.

**Keywords :** media literacy, critical pedagogy, teacher agency, misinformation, education reform, Bolivia

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