PROCEEDINGS OF THE INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC AND PRACTICAL CONFERENCE
Science and Education in Central Asia: Digital Transformation and Sustainable Development
18 December 2026 · online, Zoom · CASJ-2026
SECTION 1. PEDAGOGY, PSYCHOLOGY AND EDUCATION

DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.24156301

UDC 378.147:373.2

DEVELOPING MEDIA LITERACY IN PRESERVICE PRESCHOOL TEACHERS

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Abstract: This theoretical article examines how university coursework can help preservice preschool teachers verify online information before using it in practice. It draws on selected literature on media literacy, educators' digital competence and teacher preparation to connect source verification with decisions about teaching resources. The article proposes guided practice in tracing claims, peer discussion of resource choices and review of planning decisions during teaching practice. A shared reading example illustrates how a student can check the evidence behind an online claim and adapt an activity to a preschool group.

Keywords: Media literacy, preservice preschool teachers, source verification, teacher education, teaching practice

Introduction. Preservice preschool teachers often begin planning an activity by searching online. A resource can look ready to use while giving little information about who created it, what its claims are based on or which children it was designed for. The student then has two professional decisions to make. The first concerns whether the information can be trusted. The second concerns whether it serves a purpose in the preschool group. University coursework can make both decisions visible by asking students to explain how they chose a resource before they include it in a plan.

This article draws on selected literature on media and information literacy, educators' digital competence and teacher preparation. Its purpose is to explain how source verification can become a regular part of preparing future preschool teachers for practice. The discussion connects the literature to activities that can be incorporated into existing university coursework.

The literature was selected for its relevance to three questions. What does it mean to evaluate a media message? What makes a resource suitable for a preschool group? Where can students practise these decisions during their degree? The discussion uses educational frameworks to define the abilities involved and research on teacher preparation to establish the context. The teaching activities are proposals derived from this synthesis. The example of a shared reading session illustrates how they could be used.

Media Literacy in Preschool Teacher Education. UNESCO's media and information literacy curriculum treats critical engagement with information and media as a competence that can be developed through education [1]. For a future preschool teacher, this includes identifying who produced a message, considering its purpose, and checking the evidence for claims it makes. A teaching resource may contain a useful activity alongside an unsupported promise about how quickly children will learn. Reading carefully allows the student to identify which part of the resource can be used and which claim needs further checking.

Janegizova, Mankesh and Taubaeva identify a critical and interpretive dimension of professional digital judgment in their conceptual model for preservice early childhood teacher education [2]. The model helps locate media literacy within the wider preparation of the teacher. A student's ability to find and display a resource demonstrates technical proficiency. The media literacy decision becomes visible when the student can explain how the message was interpreted and why its claims are credible enough for the intended use.

The DigCompEdu framework connects digital resource selection to the learning objective, teaching context and learner group [3]. This adds a pedagogical question to source verification. An activity described by a credible author may still assume more vocabulary, time, or adult support than is available in a given preschool group. In coursework, students can therefore be asked to justify both the accuracy of the information and the suitability of the resource for their group.

A useful starting point is to identify the kind of claim a student plans to use. A description of what an activity involves can often be checked against the original instructions. A claim that the activity will improve learning requires evidence about the children, teaching condition and outcomes studied. A recommendation intended for a particular age group also needs to be read in that context. When students identify what a claim would commit them to saying or doing, they can decide what they need to verify and how much confidence the evidence warrants.

Bringing Source Verification into Coursework. One place to begin is the preschool teaching methods course. When students bring an online resource to class, the lecturer can ask them to select one claim they would rely on in a lesson plan or share with a family. Students then check who made the claim, trace it to its original source where possible and look for independent support. McGrew [4] describes this practice of consulting sources beyond the original page as lateral reading. In a methods course, students can record what they found in two or three sentences next to the resource. The lecturer can then discuss how the verification affected their planning decision.

The lecturer can introduce the task by opening a resource found through an ordinary search and working through one claim aloud. Students see how the lecturer identifies the author, checks the linked source and determines whether it addresses the claim. A useful classroom discussion can follow when several websites repeat the same recommendation. Students trace the links or references and look for the earliest source they can identify. If the sites all lead to the same account, the class can discuss what that account supports and which questions remain open. This gives students a concrete reason to look beyond the number of pages repeating a message.

Students can then work in pairs on resources for a topic they will teach during practice. One student explains the proposed use and the other checks whether the source supports the claim as stated. The pair revises the planning note so that a reader can tell which information comes from a source and which decision belongs to the student. The same exercise can be used with materials in Kazakh, Russian, or English. If students read a translated summary, they can compare it with the original and retain relevant details such as the children's ages and the conditions under which an activity was used.

For example, a student preparing a shared reading session finds an online post that promises rapid vocabulary growth from a set of questions to ask after any story. The student looks for the author and the basis of the promise. If the post offers no evidence for the promised effect, the student can still examine the questions as prompts for discussion. Some may ask children to explain events in words they are still learning. The student can adapt these prompts to the group, invite children to point to an illustration or describe an action and explain the adaptation in the lesson plan. This makes it possible to use the activity while keeping any statement about its benefits within the available evidence.

The planning note could say that the student chose two questions to encourage children to talk about the characters' actions and adapted the wording for the group. It could give the link to the post and record that the promise about vocabulary growth remains unverified. During the session, the student can observe who responds, whether the illustrations help children answer and where an additional prompt is needed. These observations can guide the next reading session. An account of

the activity for families can describe what children did and how they joined the discussion, with any claim about longer-term learning reserved for evidence that can support it.

Connecting Coursework with Teaching Practice. Teaching practice offers an opportunity to revisit the decision. A mentor can ask the student to bring one resource used during the week and describe how the children responded to it. The student can then compare the intended use with what happened in the group and explain what they would change next time. The discussion can focus on a particular choice, such as whether to keep a prompt that several children needed help to answer. This allows the mentor to give feedback tied to the activity the student actually planned and used.

A study of preservice teachers in Kazakhstan found that most participants demonstrated basic or intermediate digital competence on the study's assessment [5]. The study assessed digital competence broadly. In the setting discussed here, the student's explanation of a specific decision provides evidence about a more focused ability. A lecturer can read the original planning note alongside the revision after practice to see whether the student can explain what the source supported, why a resource was adapted, and how an observation influenced the next plan. Keeping both notes also gives the student a record of how their reasoning developed.

The OECD identifies workforce preparation as an important part of responding to digitalisation in early childhood education and care. Its international policy review found that relatively few participating systems required digital competence training in initial preparation for early childhood teachers [6]. Integrating verification into a methods course and the subsequent practicum is one way to give it a place in initial preparation. A lecturer can introduce the practice with examples from coursework and a mentor can refer to the same planning note when discussing its use with children. The student then encounters a consistent expectation in both settings.

Discussing Resource Choices with Students. Feedback can begin with the sentence in the plan that depends on an online source. If a student writes that an activity develops vocabulary, the lecturer can ask what the student would expect to see during the session and what supports the broader claim about development. The student may find that a more precise statement is possible, such as saying that the prompts give children a chance to name actions in the story. The lecturer can then ask how the student will make that opportunity available to children who are quieter or still learning the language of the group. The conversation connects the strength of the evidence with a practical teaching choice.

Students can also be invited to explain how they would respond if a colleague chose the same material for a different age group. They might keep the illustration, change the questions, or replace the activity after looking at the language and attention it requires. Asking each student to explain their choice makes differences in reasoning available for discussion. DigCompEdu treats resource selection as a decision that depends on the learners and the teaching situation [3]. The comparison between two plausible uses can help students see how this aspect of professional judgment works in a preschool setting.

Source checking also matters when a resource is shared outside the classroom. A student who prepares a short message for families can practise describing the activity in ordinary language, identifying the source and making clear which suggestions came from the preschool. A lecturer can ask students to review one another's messages and point to any sentence that implies a stronger claim than the source supports. The student can then revise that sentence or clarify its basis. This exercise extends the critical engagement described in the UNESCO curriculum [1] to a communication task that future preschool teachers can encounter in practice.

The same approach can support feedback when students work under time pressure. The lecturer can ask for a brief record of the most consequential decision, such as whether a claim about expected learning should be included in the plan. If the original source is difficult to trace, the student can explain what they were able to establish and choose material whose origin is clearer. Discussing that choice gives the lecturer a chance to address uncertainty as part of everyday planning.

The teaching activities described here can be incorporated into lesson plans that students already prepare. A programme could begin with one resource in a methods course and revisit it

during practice. To study the approach, future research could compare students' written explanations before and after repeated opportunities to verify sources, then use interviews to clarify why they made particular choices. A study could also examine whether students apply what they learned to a new resource when the lecturer supplies only the teaching objective. This would help establish how far the practice transfers beyond the initial assignment.

Conclusion. Preschool teacher education can develop media literacy by including source verification in the work students already do when planning activities. A brief written rationale gives lecturers and mentors a way to discuss the evidence behind a resource, the needs of a particular group, and any adaptations the student made. The approach is proposed on the basis of selected literature. Its use in methods courses and teaching practice provides a starting point for future study of how students learn to justify their choices.

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