



Teaching media literacy in Europe: evidence of effective school practices in primary and secondary education

Executive Summary



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Rapid advances in digital technologies and a simultaneous increase in internet use have highlighted the importance of preparing students to access, use, understand and critically assess all forms of media. Wider access to the internet and digital media has delivered to students and teachers increasing amounts of information, and facilitates self-expression, active forms of citizenship, and creative communication with a broader audience. However, students are also increasingly at risk of being exposed to various forms of disinformation, propaganda, radical and violent messages, indoctrination, and hate speech. The benefits of wider access to increasing volumes of information are clear, yet in many if not all European countries this is also presenting challenges to their citizens, democratic processes, security, and ‘social fabric’.

The spread of disinformation and ‘fake news’ pose acute challenges for Member States’ education systems. Students (and indeed all citizens) need to develop pertinent competences to navigate these fast-changing environments. Research shows that education in media literacy can have positive outcomes on students’ knowledge, skills and attitudes in analysing and critically understanding the media and disinformation. Crucially, competences alone are no guarantee of civility: creators of disinformation, political campaign teams using social media data, extremists, and ‘troll farm’ agents, all possess very high levels of competences in media literacy. In this report, media literacy education is seen not only as a set of competences for students to develop, but also as a dimension of agency; competences alone cannot provide all the tools required for students to view the media critically, nor are they enough to cultivate active forms of citizenship based on democratic values and attitudes.

Research and policy initiatives on media literacy and media education have been growing across Europe and the English-speaking world for decades. However, there is a lack of systematised comparative evidence about ‘what works’ in media literacy education practices at classroom level.

Within this context, this report details the latest research in the area of media literacy and media education with regard to primary and secondary education in Europe. This report is aimed at policymakers, practitioners and researchers in the fields of school education, media and digital policies. It reviews relevant European and international research to better understand how teaching and learning practices can support students’ media literacy in primary and secondary education. It also aims to understand how media literacy education in schools can help address the challenges related to the spread of disinformation and ‘fake news’.

More specifically, the report aims to answer the following questions:

- What teaching and learning practices at primary and secondary level can support students’ media literacy, facilitate their critical engagement with media and support their active citizenship in the public sphere?
- What specific challenges does the spread of disinformation pose for teaching and learning media literacy education in schools, and how can these challenges be addressed?
- What media education literacy practices are most effective and suitable at primary (ISCED 1) and secondary levels (ISCED 2-3)?
- What competences can help to build media literacy among students at school level?

- What classroom assessment practices can be effective tools to assess students' media literacy?
- How can media literacy education help address the challenges posed by the spread of disinformation and 'fake news'?
- What key policy recommendations can be made to better address media literacy in EU Member States' education systems and schools?

Key findings

Main competences to support media literacy in education

Media literacy covers the following competences:

- **Access:** the ability to find and use media skilfully and to share suitable and valuable information with others (including browsing, searching, filtering and managing data, information and digital content).
- **Analysis and evaluation:** the capacity to comprehend messages and use critical thinking and understanding to analyse their quality, veracity, credibility and point of view, while considering their potential effects or consequences.
- **Creation:** the capacity to create media content and confidently express oneself with an awareness of purpose, audience and composition techniques.
- **Reflection:** the capacity to apply social responsibility and ethical principles to one's own identity, communication and conduct, to develop an awareness of and to manage one's media life.
- **Action/agency:** the capacity to act and engage in citizenship through media, to become political agents in a democratic society.

These competences work together to support students' active participation in learning through the processes of consuming and creating media messages. They can be supported in primary and secondary education through the integration of media literacy in the school curriculum, and in dedicated classroom practices via specific teaching and learning practices which address disinformation. Competences for media literacy are also supported by favourable contextual factors such as pertinent teacher education, a supportive school environment, and local partnerships.

Media literacy competences are required to actively participate in democratic society; they enable citizens to access, understand and deal with the media, and encourages them to become political agents. They can allow students to use their voices through active participation in online activities, facilitate students' active citizenship competences and agency to express their politics and participate in the public sphere.

Media literacy education practices to address disinformation

The current media landscape has been marked by the spread of disinformation and 'fake news', which is having an unwelcome impact on students and on classroom learning. Disinformation campaigns have certainly made life more difficult for teachers who seek to convey the value of evidence to their students, especially in subject areas that are especially prone to propaganda such as science, history and citizenship education.

There is an ongoing debate on the best strategy to address students' susceptibility to disinformation, revolving around the extent to which interventions should target a person's core belief system and worldview. In formal education, this especially applies to secondary school students, given the fact that they have more fully developed belief systems.

Media literacy initiatives, including educational programmes involving journalists, have been shown to lessen the vulnerability of children to disinformation. The development of critical thinking and analytical competences are key components of a successful educational intervention. Evidence shows that students who reported high levels of media literacy learning opportunities were more likely to identify misinformation, which lends credence to the impact of media literacy programmes.

Effective teaching and learning media literacy practices at school level

Media literacy education, taken to mean learning about the use and production of media, can be advantageous to and integrated in virtually all curriculum subjects (e.g. mother tongue education, history, geography, civic and citizenship education, science education). However, media education is not taught as a separate and independent mandatory school subject in any EU country. Instead, where it exists at all, it is predominately cross-curricular and integral, or modular. As of 2014, most EU Member States had not yet adopted a media education curriculum, and schools largely had autonomy in their decisions about media literacy education practices.

One of the key challenges of teaching and learning media literacy at classroom level is the thorny question of how to effectively consolidate the school and out-of-school media literacy practices that are essential to cross the home-school and online-offline institutionally constructed divides.

Our understanding of and approach to media literacy is mainly based on research in secondary school classrooms. The limited but influential research in primary school classrooms suggests that it is hard to distance and distinguish media literacy at this level from literacy innovations.

Teaching and learning practices for media literacy education can involve various classroom-based methods (e.g. active inquiry, discussion-based learning, collaborative learning and educational leadership, game-based learning, etc.), most of which are based on active learning. Medium or genre specific pedagogical practices are commonly used in teaching and learning with media literacy (e.g. combined advertising and science literacies).

Key conditions for successful implementation of media literacy education practices in school

There is an urgent need for media literacy educators and stakeholders to document their best practice in the form of empirical classroom research, and to address enduring disconnects between theory and practice, conceptual frameworks and pedagogic practice, and educational/political policy and classroom practices. The integration of digital literacy in the maturation phase, specifically into science education, is flourishing as a research area.

Successful implementation of media literacy education at the school level is facilitated by approaches to pedagogy that combine and/or cross boundaries between spaces and roles — the classroom and the extended 'third space', teachers and students working in partnership to co-create learning, and professional development in hybrid combinations of physical and virtual networks.

There is a wealth of evidence of more formal, funded, partnership engagements between media literacy educators and media industries, literacy organisations, NGOs and other stakeholders at the

level of resource production and single events. However, empirical evidence of the conditions for successful partnership and impacts at the school level are likely to be in the public domain within two to three years, as many relevant projects are ongoing.

Policy pointers

This report consolidates evidence on the ways in which media literacy can be taught at classroom level in primary and secondary education. The following pointers aimed at relevant education policymakers at EU, national and/or regional level draw on the key conclusions of the report.

➤ **Develop dynamic media literacy curricula that enable full coverage of the five main competences for media literacy**

Policy pointers

- Policymakers should develop dynamic media literacy curricula at primary and secondary level that fully cover the five main competences for media literacy shared by international models: access, analysis and evaluation, creation, reflection, and action/agency.
- Media literacy curricula should prioritise students' active learning and agentive use of and creation of all forms of media.
- Media literacy curricula should also cover the specific elements of the Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (DigComp), including media production; civic media engagement; active inquiry; discussion-based learning; project-based learning; collaborative learning; game-based learning and critical and reflective learning about data and identity.

➤ **Provide media educators with support and resources for addressing students' media literacy more holistically**

Policy pointers

- Policymakers should provide media educators with adequate support and sufficient resources for addressing students' media literacy more holistically by bringing together school-based and out-of-school media literacy practices.
- Media literacy initiatives should aim to cross the home-school and online-offline divides, thereby creating a 'third space' for more agentive (active, critical and engaged) media literacy education.

➤ **Raise awareness about disinformation and the misuse of data in education**

Policy pointers

- Policymakers should raise awareness about disinformation and the misuse of data at all levels of education.
- The spread of disinformation and misuse of data in education should be tackled in primary and secondary education through specific policies targeted at these levels of education.

➤ **Invest in further research into good practices in teaching media literacy to build resilience to misinformation**

Policy pointers

- Policymakers should invest in further research into good ‘sense-making’ practices in teaching media literacy to build resilience to misinformation and conspiracy theories (such as inoculation approaches).
- Research findings should be used to resolve the debate around media literacy and students’ belief systems, and facilitate far-reaching dissemination of these best practices for consistent adoption by media educators.

➤ **Invest in further research to explore media literacy education across all school levels**

Policy pointers

- Policymakers should invest in further research to explore media literacy education across school levels.
- Research should aim to identify the similarities and differences between media literacy education at primary and secondary levels.
- Policymakers should support the development and use of systematic assessment methods, and based on this level-specific understanding of media literacy and media education.

➤ **Facilitate and invest in large-scale collaboration initiatives in media literacy education**

Policy pointers

- Policymakers should facilitate and invest in large-scale collaboration initiatives between media literacy educators, data analysts, social media platforms, journalists and NGOs.
- Support to these initiatives should have the explicit objective of bringing the best practices of short-term, small-scale media literacy partnership projects, into the formal school curricula and classroom practice for all students.

➤ **Define and adopt a clear connection between media and digital literacy policy, media education curricula, and teacher education**

Policy pointers

- Policymakers should define and adopt a clear connection between media and digital literacy policy, media education curricula in primary and secondary education, and teacher education, from initial teacher education (ITE) to comprehensive professional development (CPD).
- Such a clear and comprehensive policy approach to media and digital literacy should increase the chances of success of implementing media literacy education and digital competences in school education.

➤ **Support the inclusion of an assessment of media literacy competences in the OECD PISA test.**

Policy pointers

- Policymakers should support the inclusion of an assessment of students' media literacy competences in the next round of the OECD PISA test.
- The PISA test should assess all the components of media literacy competences, including knowledge, cognitive skills, social skills and attitudes.

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