

# The need for media literacy in public education

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## ABSTRACT

The current significantly increasing progress of information and communication has influenced the essence of children's and adolescents' education. While public life is intertwined with the media, to concern the various dimensions of the media and to get accustomed to its opportunities and threats seems a pivotal issue. As the use of any tool requires the relevant knowledge, the proper use of the media necessitates educating the associated literacy. Media literacy is taught for specific goals among countries. In Canada, they begin to teach it to avoid the importation of American culture since childhood. Japan's approach concerns technology literacy and some countries aim at raising public awareness and preventing cultural aggression. However, in Iran, no fundamental action has been taken in the field of media literacy. According to the Fundamental Transformation Document, media literacy education is essential as the beginning of an auspicious movement to provide students with critical and participatory thinking about the media. Research on media literacy education has led to the emergence of questioning habits, researching, strengthening expressive skills for making a conscious and critical connection with the media, and establishing a precise look with a critical analysis of media messages. The present article primarily addresses the theoretical basis, the meaning of literacy, media literacy, its dimensions, advantages and necessity of teaching media literacy, so that the reader is encouraged to learn media literacy while being informed about the meaning, significance, and urgency of it.

**Keywords:** Media Literacy, Fundamental Transformation Document, Critical Thinking, Media Messages, Skill.

## Introduction

Since there is no border for media, to educate media literacy, and to increase media awareness is needed. Media literacy does not belong to a particular group; it is for all of the people from children to adults. As, nowadays, in countries like Canada and Japan as the leaders, the subject of media literacy is included in the curriculum of their schools. Unhappily, even most of the Iranian students studying communication are not very familiar with such a preface, while they should be guides of others in the community in this area. Thus, given the growing importance of media literacy in societies and the globally significant advances, the vacancy of the subject of media literacy in communication discussions is perceived more because it is seemingly what the

audiences of the powerful media of the contemporary world urgently need <sup>[1]</sup>.

But how could we raise our awareness of and information about the media? Since we are all influenced by media information, we need a set of instruments and raw materials. The instruments include our abilities and skills, and the raw material consist of the information and knowledge of the media and the world around us. If we have a lot of information but less or weak skills, we will not be able to benefit from that information <sup>[2]</sup>.

## Theoretical basis

According to James Potter's theory, media literacy encompasses three components: personal sources, knowledge structures, and skills. A personal source explains the motives and drivers of the media audiences as the audiences' enjoyment of the media ranges from active to passive action. Knowledge structures are a set of information programmed into a person's memory that is not created automatically; they need to be made with care and precision <sup>[3]</sup>.

Interpretive and preferential military media literacy is influenced by mental and moral understanding that shapes a person's exposure to media messages (both available and searchable) and

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makes the audience take more responsibility in using and selecting messages <sup>[4]</sup>. From David Buckingham's point of view, the term media literacy refers to the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to use and interpret media. <sup>[5]</sup>. He believes that the purpose of media education is often to develop students' critical abilities. Media education is essentially associated with the development of critical awareness. It is claimed that the process of critical analysis of media enables students to unfasten the values and the mode of thinking that the media intends to impose. The goal is not only the awareness and critical understanding, but it necessitates the critical ability, self-reliance without helped by others <sup>[6]</sup>.

From Shokrkah's perspective, media literacy is a type of perception relying on skill on the base of which the types of media and media productions can be distinguished and identified. He believes that media literacy is a blend of techniques for effective uses and identification of the media <sup>[7]</sup>.

The followings present the key concepts in media literacy:

All of the media messages are structural; they have specific language and principles; different individuals experience a single message in different ways; the media entail specific values and sights; and most of the media are organized for more profit and strength <sup>[8]</sup>.

Communication experts consider the following characteristics for individuals with media literacy:

- They use media wisely, purposefully, and effectively with management and planning.
- They participate in critical thinking when evaluating medium.
- They evaluate the validity of different information sources and do not rely simply on just one source.
- They perceive the power of media messages and know how to read, see, or hear them more consciously.
- They are aware of the influence of the media on the formation of beliefs, values, and behaviors.
- They are aware of the duplicated and culturally diverse world and appreciate different perspectives.
- They express their views and insights clearly and creatively using various forms of media <sup>[9]</sup>.

### The meaning of literacy

Today, a fundamental shift is seen in communication and information technology, a new breed of knowledge, if it is new and the word "literacy" is appropriate to describe it. It is in the midst of a series of stimulating debates in universities, political communities, and among the public. This has led to the formation of a group of experts in the fields of literacy, culture, media education, human-computer interaction, and social studies in technology <sup>[10]</sup>.

Literacy is acquired. The acquisition of literacy embodies special conceptual implications as well. Purposefulness and self-awareness are the basic competencies of acquisition. Acquiring everything requires the individual's decision and effort to achieve

it. Therefore, his conscious decision and diligent effort to acquire is essential.

Literacy is a lexicon that refers to the understanding of a type of knowledge content. This conceptual analysis, borrowed from Peters and Hearst's analysis, emphasizes that in the case of taking understanding into account, the discussion of the content of knowledge and theory can't be avoided. <sup>[11]</sup>

History tells us that even the finite and yet the most common meaning of the term "literacy" which is the same as the ability to read and write, suggests a complex history of competition for power and authority to access, interpret, and produce printed texts.

### Media

"Media" refers to the instruments of conveying a message from the sender or senders to the addressee or audiences. These instruments include newspapers, books, radio, television, satellite, new communication and information technologies, the Internet, etc. These devices have features such as unknown message recipients, high speed, and message replication <sup>[12]</sup>.

"Mass media" is the plural form of "medium", which refers to those devices that are considered by a large number of new civilizations <sup>[5]</sup>.

The media often change cultures, whether in the sense of art and symbolic forms or fashions, moods, lifestyles, and norms. The media has also become the dominant source of definitions and images of social realities among individuals, groups, and communities. They express their value and normative judgments as an inherent part of and mixed with news and entertaining programs <sup>[13]</sup>.

### Media literacy

"Media literacy" does not simply mean reading and writing, nor does it mean distinguishing the news from an interview or a discussion, and so on. Media literacy seeks to discern the relationship between knowledge and power and then the relationship between power and social justice. It is the power to understand how media works and how conceptualization occurs through them <sup>[1]</sup>.

Institutions and organizations involved in media literacy, such as UNESCO, the European Commission, and the European Parliament, agree on four areas of media literacy skills, including the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and produce creatively. All of these skills enhance the development of personal aspects of self-awareness, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities. These four areas can be described as "the ability to access and use the media", "analysis and evaluation", "production and communication with media messages", and "critical thinking" <sup>[13]</sup>. According to Robert Anis, quoted by Eidizadeh (2013), media literacy is a part of mental skill and ability that motivates a person to make decisions and behave wisely. It entails values such as pursuing truth, justice and fairness, autonomy, and personal criticism.

Moreover, media literacy is a powerful critical thought that seeks to meet our media needs. The purposeful attitude of the audience

towards the media is considered as one of the reasons for the increased level of awareness among all clusters of every society. This might provoke bilateral and participatory communication with the media as well as enhancement of the democratic structures of society in line with the issues of criticism and active media participation among the citizens. Media literacy encompasses training the skills needed for thoughtful and conscious communication with the media and, at the same time, providing an accurate, critical, and analytical look at media messages (written, visual, and auditory). Elizabeth Thoman, the founder, and director of the Center for Media Education in Los Angeles defines media literacy as “the ability to change and create personalized concepts out of hundreds and even thousands of phonics that we receive from newspapers, magazines, and commercials. Media literacy means the ability to select, to engage with challenge and question, to be aware of what is going on around, and the ability to not be passive and vulnerable”.

### Dimensions of media literacy

Media literacy education includes four components: cognitive, emotional, aesthetic, and moral. Each of these dimensions focuses on a different range of our perception.

1. Cognitive dimension requires a person to expand the structure of his knowledge. To acquire knowledge about a subject is achieved through multiple media sources and the real world.
2. The emotional dimension enlightens controlling emotions and feelings in the face of media messages.
3. Aesthetic dimension helps interpret the message and the way of compiling, editing, lighting, designing page layout, etc. It also includes people’s awareness of the manner of artistic manipulations and tricks.
4. The moral dimension covers understanding values. Today, the media sometimes blurs moral boundaries and offers new patterns of action and behavior. The ethical dimension is the distinction between right and wrong. From this perspective, media literacy is the management and mitigation of the adverse effects of the media <sup>[14]</sup>.

### Benefits of media literacy education

Media literacy provides us with the benefits of being able to be an effective person in our media community. Therefore, we need to be able to: Identify different forms of media, and to enjoy various media through sufficient awareness and cognition. The followings are some of the benefits:

- To be a mindful user of the media
- To manage information and utilize the media based on our information needs, and not succumbed by the powerful multimedia tools of the global media culture;
- To ask basic questions about what we read, see and hear;
- To behave critically with media content
- To analyze the cultural, social, economic, and advertising context of the media environment;

- To make healthy social relations through information and knowledge. <sup>[15]</sup>

There is a need for a critical reconstruction of education to present techniques for educating literacy and to enable students, teachers, and citizens to recognize the nature and effects of media culture. From this perspective, media culture is a form of education that teaches appropriate and inappropriate behaviors, the role of gender, values, and knowledge of the world. Frequently, people are unaware that they are learning and standing in the educational positions that are often invisible and are subconsciously captured by media culture. <sup>[16]</sup>

### The need for media literacy education

In the turbulent era of information, while men experience diverse audio, visual, and written media, media literacy is considered as a requirement of social life and its importance is not less than the reading/writing literacy. This is because the proper medium selection is possible by media literacy. Thus, due to the students’ daily exposure to a mass of media messages and since they rarely distinguish media messages, training-social institutions like education centers and universities as the custodian for human being’s education take the main responsibility.

Students’ capabilities to access, evaluate, analyze, and produce media messages could raise by educating media literacy. Also, thinking skills and critical attitudes will be empowered. Having such skills, students will identify the persuasion methods, medium orientation, and socio-cultural values conveyed via the medium. Further, media literacy education teaches how to produce media messages for students. As the students’ awareness of media messages production increases, their ability to evaluate and analyze a message increases, too.

To achieve the vital goal of education that is the preparation of children and teens for social life, appropriateness, and consistency of education with social, political, and economic changes at the national and international levels is an expectation. If the education does not align with the global approaches, it will be abolished and replaced by informal and transnational education <sup>[9]</sup>.

Information era audiences particularly teens and youth need for learning media literacy to realize the goals of the medium hidden in the induced lifestyle and react actively to the content of that medium. This is attained if education centers provide individuals with the ability to detect and decode the message content <sup>[10]</sup>.

### Conclusion

Schools around the world incorporate media literacy education into their curriculum. In Canada as the leading country, such education becomes pervasive. However, any effective and pervasive action has not been done in Iran. In the globalization ear, due to the expansion of communications and the relevant technologies, and the increased level of media output, awareness of media benefits and problems may help people recognize the

impacts of media messages. Media literacy education is essential for today's citizens. It mainly aims at identifying the media consumption regime in the network communities, developing the critical thinking for media satisfaction techniques, enhancing individuals' ability to analyze a message, producing content in accordance with media literacy indicators, promoting Iranian-Islamic values and lifestyle, and preventing socio-cultural flaws to implement Fundamental Transformation Document. However, in the plans implemented during the last 30 years, modern and appropriate training/educating ways were not identified in terms of theoretical basis, style, and method. At the moment, teaching/ learning methods and attitudes needed for a change and a plan-oriented system should replace a book-oriented system. From this point of view, the contributory document for education in Iran was introduced for achieving the goals of 1404 Perspective. The document includes 8 main objectives and 130 operational strategies for a fundamental transformation in education. Here, some of the strategies for media literacy education are presented:

1. To promote and deepen media literacy among the parents
2. To generalize educators' computer literacy and develop the application of modern educational technologies
3. To develop Internet and Intranet dominance with the preference of filling the digital gap
4. To provide schools infrastructures with technology (hardware/software) in accordance with the curriculum
5. To produce and use electronic content consistent with students and schools' needs
6. To dominate active learning methods by using information and communication technologies at schools
7. To improve the attitude and enhance trainers' skills of optimized using of technologies

It is expected that policymakers and the Supreme Education Council's efforts will lead to an effective movement towards the education of media literacy.

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