

Pathology of Media Literacy in Elementary School Students and to Present a Model for the Curriculum

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Introduction

Media literacy, defined as the ability to analyze, evaluate, and consciously engage with media, is increasingly recognized as an essential skill in modern society. It enables individuals—particularly students—to identify reliable information and resist the influence of misinformation, disinformation, and harmful media content (Eisenstock, 2024; Hobbs, 2017). Bulger & Davison (2024) argue that media literacy is a key tool against fake news, gaining support from educators and policymakers and being integrated into school curricula. Wood (2020) views media literacy as an emerging educational field that combines critical analysis and evaluation with research-based processing, encouraging students to apply information in cognitive, ethical, aesthetic, and emotional contexts; however, lack of resources remains the main reason teachers avoid using media content in classrooms. MacDonald (2008) shows that media literacy structures naturally appear in classroom discussions, research projects, journalistic writing, and presentations.

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Despite its importance, the Iranian educational curriculum has not yet fully integrated media literacy, focusing mainly on theoretical aspects while lacking practical and critical approaches. Therefore, it is essential to examine the current state of media literacy among elementary school students and identify the challenges and gaps within the curriculum. This study aims to develop a practical and effective model for integrating media literacy concepts into the curriculum, enabling students to use media responsibly and wisely. Considering the vital role of media literacy in social development and civic engagement, addressing its shortcomings at the elementary level and designing an optimal curriculum model is of great importance.

Accordingly, the research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the challenges in teaching media literacy at the elementary level?
2. What is the optimal curriculum model for integrating media literacy into elementary education?

Methodology

To investigate the educational and implementation challenges, a descriptive phenomenological approach was employed. The study population comprised 80 elementary school teachers and principals in Meymeh, from which 18 participants were selected through purposive sampling, including snowball and reputational techniques. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews.

For the refinement and validation of the proposed model, a focus group method was conducted with seven participants, including experts in media literacy, curriculum planning, and selected teachers. In the first phase, data were analyzed through summarization and coding following Glaser and Strauss's method, supported by MAXQDA software, while the second phase involved inferential analysis.

Findings

First Question: What are the challenges in teaching media literacy at the elementary level?

The study identified eight key challenges in media literacy education:

1. Lack of acceptance and legitimacy for media literacy
2. Students' inability to verify the accuracy of information
3. Failure to foster critical reflection and understanding
4. Inadequate response to students' informational needs
5. Students' inability to recognize persuasive techniques in media
6. Lack of responsibility in selecting and using media messages
7. Difficulty in understanding visual communication forms
8. Failure to improve students' quality of life

Second Question: What is the optimal curriculum model for integrating media literacy into elementary education?

Based on the identified challenges, the following curriculum model was proposed:

1. Teaching information verification skills
2. Enhancing critical understanding
3. Addressing contemporary informational needs
4. Analyzing persuasive techniques in media
5. Promoting responsible media use
6. Recognizing visual communication forms
7. Improving students' quality of life through media literacy
8. Preparing students for media literacy classes
9. Encouraging structured and safe internet use in schools

Conclusion

The findings reveal a significant gap between the intended and implemented media literacy curriculum at the secondary level, with the intended curriculum itself exhibiting major content deficiencies. Rapid technological advancements further contribute to the obsolescence of the material. Additionally, teachers' media literacy competencies may not fully align with curricular expectations, which can negatively impact instructional quality. A noteworthy finding was the effectiveness of incorporating humor into textbook content.

The following section presents a set of recommendations:

- Integrating media literacy with social topics in textbooks – This approach can enhance students' motivation and strengthen their engagement with the content.
- Providing training courses for teachers – Familiarizing teachers with the latest trends and techniques in media literacy can improve their collaboration and instructional quality.
- Introducing practical, classroom-based projects – Implementing hands-on projects in classes can increase the relevance and applicability of the content.

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