

Information Literacy in Higher Education: Empowering Generation Z through Critical Thinking

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Introduction

This paper addresses the educational challenge of updating the approach on Information Literacy (IL) for undergraduate students, specifically in media and communication studies, more than a decade after the establishment of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

Relevance

Current EHEA curriculum reflects the early 21st century concern for fostering digital skills and teaching students how to use Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). However, the social and informational context has changed and we are now working with a digitally immersed youth, whose main challenge is no longer knowing ICTs but rather dealing with saturation of information and *infoxication* (Dias, 2014).

Research question

How to improve the learning process and to engage with the new generation of *tiktokers*, who are overwhelmed by information flow and face the difficulties of discerning content beyond criteria of virality and likability?

Methods

We reviewed the evolution and new trends in Media and Information Literacy (MIL) to revise and update our course content and methodology.

Results

Interests and concerns around education related to information has evolved at international level over the last decades. Table 1 summarises main approaches:

Table 1. Evolution of approaches toward information education

Period (approximate)	Main focus
1970s-1980s	The International Council for Film, Television and Audiovisual Communication (ICFT) and the UNESCO, with its Grünwald declaration, raised concern for the need of media education to address the real-life experiences of students living in a mediated world, particularly characterised by the boom of television (Morsy, 1984).
1990s-2000s	Technological developments around the turn of the century, with the spread of ICTs and the rise of a network society, shift the interest toward training students in digital skills particularly to meet market demand (OECD, 2005), as reflected in the framework for digital competences of the European Union (Ferrari, 2012).
2010s-2020s	Since the Alexandria Proclamation (UNESCO, 2005), which stated that "Information Literacy and lifelong learning are the beacons of the Information Society, illuminating the courses to development, prosperity and freedom", the UNESCO focused on the need of Media and Information Literacy (MIL). The UNESCO (n. d.) proposed MIL as a composite concept that plays a primary role in people's lives as it empowers citizens to understand and evaluate information and media content in all formats and for all aspects of life.

Source: own elaboration.

According to the perspectives emerged over the last decade, in 2011 the UNESCO launched a Media and Information Literacy (MIL) initiative considering it a prerequisite for equitable societies and empowered citizens in a global society (UNESCO, n. d.):

Our brains depend on information to work optimally. The quality of information we engage with largely determines our perceptions, beliefs and attitudes. It could be information from other persons, the media, libraries, archives, museums, publishers, or other information providers including those on the Internet.

The UNESCO efforts in this programme include a line of work on teacher training, with the *MIL curriculum for teachers* (Grizzle & Wilson, 2011), a handbook focused on disinformation (Iretón & Posetti, 2018) or a yearbook on the role of MIL in reinforcing human rights and countering extremism (Singh et al., 2016). Moreover, the programme includes the creation of other initiatives, such as the Framework and Plan of Action for the Global Alliance Partnerships on Media and Information Literacy (GAPMIL) in 2013, the MILCLICKS space to promote a better use of the Internet and the media among citizens, and the creation of Global Media and Information Literacy Week, during 24-31 October, since 2019 (UNESCO, 2018).

This rationale and initiatives are aligned with other current proposals of critical MIL to understand, manage and assess information, which is considered essential to empower citizens, as it allows to make balanced judgements and express informed views (Elmborg, 2012; CILIP, 2018).

Conclusion

We revised the evolution and new trends in information education and the results contribute to revise our content and pedagogical proposal for a course on Documentation and Information based on the need of shifting the focus from technological and digital training to critical thinking and MIL in order to promote empowered citizens and, particularly, future media professionals.

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