

The Logic, Practice, and Enlightenment of UNESCO's Promotion of Media and Information Literacy

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Abstract:

After years of efforts, UNESCO's work on media and information literacy has made important achievements. The article has sorted out and analysed the concepts of media and information literacy put forward by UNESCO, related policy documents, practical activities and their interconnections by means of literature research, network research and other methods, trying to show the theoretical logic and specific practice of related work as a whole. China's information literacy education also needs to update its concepts, learn from advanced international concepts and experiences, conduct relevant research and practice from an interdisciplinary perspective, establish and improve relevant policies and standards, encourage multi-party participation, adopt a multi-pronged educational strategy, expand teaching methods and contents, and strengthen international cooperation and exchange to promote China's media and information literacy education and development.

Keywords:

UNESCO, Media and Information Literacy, Information Literacy

1. Introduction

In modern societies, information and knowledge are crucial for human survival and self-realisation, as well as for sustainable social development. Nowadays, information and multiple modes of communication are indispensable conditions in the process of democratic debate, group building and collaborative innovation, but they have also given rise to problems such as the proliferation of false information and the collapse of the media information system. It is increasingly important for the public to be able to identify false information and think critically, which are closely related to information literacy, media literacy and other literacy skills. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has proposed to combine information literacy, media literacy, digital literacy, and ICT literacy into a composite concept called "Media and Information Literacy (MIL)". Since then, UNESCO has been improving and promoting the development of MIL globally through a series of actions (conferences, activities, documents, publications, etc.).

At present, there are more textual studies on the MIL documents proposed by UNESCO, but there is a lack of a panoramic view of UNESCO's work on MIL from the perspective of combining theory and practice. In view of this, this paper combs and analyses the MIL concepts, related policy documents, practical activities and their interconnections proposed by UNESCO, and tries to show the theoretical logic and specific practice of UNESCO's global MIL work as a whole, so as to provide reference for promoting the development of relevant MIL in China.

2. Theoretical Logic of UNESCO's Proposal and Promotion of MIL

2.1. Convergence of the concept of literacy and the proposal of MIL

With the development of information, media, ICTs and the digital world, the concept of literacy has been derived and developed over the past few decades, and it includes cyber literacy, digital literacy, e-literacy, information literacy, media literacy, journalism literacy, technological or information and communication technology (or ICT) literacy, etc. In the 20th century, the study and education of information literacy and media literacy were rooted in different disciplines, with information literacy stems from the fields of librarianship and informatics, with an emphasis on accessing, evaluating, creating and utilising information through a variety of tools, formats and channels. Media literacy is rooted in media and civic studies and is the ability of people to understand, select, evaluate and use media. In contrast, ICT literacy and digital literacy have their origins in computer science and informatics. The conceptual use of digital literacy is often similar to that of information literacy. Currently, the convergence of technologies is blurring the boundaries between the various literacies. UNESCO argues that media literacy, information literacy, ICT literacy and digital literacy overlap in a number of ways, such as in terms of the object of study, human rights perspectives, critique and reflection, competence development, impact on one's socio-professional career, and interdisciplinary approaches, and that the concepts of these literacies can be brought together under one umbrella to form a complementary and unifying coverage concept. and unifying overlay concepts.

In 2008, UNESCO formally introduced the composite concept of "media and information literacy" at a conference in Paris, France, and defined it as a set of competencies that enable people to search, critically evaluate, and judiciously use and disseminate information and media content using different information sources and media in their lives and work.

2.2. Interpretation of the MIL concept

The interpretation of MIL as a whole has been repeatedly emphasised and elaborated in various publications issued by UNESCO. Summarising the original literature available, MIL as a composite concept encompasses the knowledge, skills and attitudes that enable citizens to achieve access to, evaluate and innovate with information and media. Specifically: (1) understanding the roles and functions of media and other information providers (including libraries, archives, museums, publishers, and information providers on the Internet) in a democratic society; (2) understanding the conditions under which these functions can be fulfilled; (3) recognising and articulating the need for information; (4) locating and accessing relevant information; (5) critically evaluating information and the purposes of media and other information providers; and (6) understanding the role of information and media and other information providers. information providers' purposes; (6) extract

and organise information and media content; (7) synthesise or manage ideas abstracted from information on the web; (8) communicate one's understanding of knowledge creation to an audience or reader in an ethical and responsible manner and in an appropriate form and medium; (9) be able to apply ICT skills to process information and produce user-generated content; (10) engage with media and other information providers to promote self-expression, freedom of expression, intercultural dialogue and democratic participation [1].

2.3. Importance of MIL

UNESCO believes that MIL is essential for the sustainable development of society. Every citizen needs to learn, understand the rules of media and information dissemination, and learn more about the opportunities and threats from the virtual world. MIL emphasises the three dimensions of knowledge, skills and attitudes and defines a set of competencies with which a citizen can effectively access, evaluate and create information. Therefore, in an information society where information content is endless, true and false information is mixed, false information is widely disseminated, and hate speech is becoming more prevalent, there is an urgent need to improve MIL literacy for all. Improve the ability to use various means, including ICTs, to access, evaluate, create and share information and media, and enhance awareness of one's online rights and interests; develop the public's ability to look critically at issues and understand how to respond to hate speech, false information and news and cyber-bullying on the Internet; and learn about the ethical issues that arise around the access to and use of information, and help people to make use of the most effective, inclusive and ethical ways to to freely express, search for and impart information in order to better participate in society and enjoy their civic rights.

2.4. UNESCO's unique strengths in promoting global MIL

First, UNESCO is a specialised agency of the United Nations responsible for promoting the dissemination of, and access to, information and knowledge worldwide, and its constitution states that the organisation has "the responsibility to promote the free flow of ideas by word and image". This is in line with MIL's goal of helping citizens to effectively seek, evaluate, use and create information, and to enhance citizens' access to ideas and freedom of expression. UNESCO, as a neutral intermediary organisation with a global reputation, not only provides access to a wide range of resources and experts, but also offers a broad global perspective. Its global influence in the field of education is second to none. UNESCO promotes MIL to member countries all over the world, guides the work of member countries by holding a series of international conferences, issuing declarations, formulating policies and strategies, establishing assessment frameworks, curriculum frameworks, etc., promotes cooperation among governments, educational institutions, NGOs and enterprises of member countries, and carries out educational projects related to MIL in various countries, so as to enhance exchanges and cooperation among countries in this field. It also promotes cooperation among governments, educational institutions, NGOs and enterprises of member countries, carries out educational programmes related to MIL in various countries, and enhances exchanges and collaboration in this field.

Secondly, UNESCO's intersectoral and interdisciplinary approach is in line with the cross-border nature of MIL, which is a comprehensive concept with interdisciplinary and evolving scope that spans many different policy areas and themes, such as

education or social and human sciences, gender equality, inclusion, etc. UNESCO approaches the issue with an interdisciplinary perspective, through intersectoral and interdisciplinary approaches. UNESCO approaches issues from an interdisciplinary perspective and works through intersectoral, cross-programme and interdisciplinary approaches. Examples include UNESCO's cooperation programmes on MIL and intercultural dialogue; the integration of MIL into the Mediterranean Youth Network project and the project on the prevention of violent extremism; and the integration of MIL into global citizenship education.

3. Specific Practices of UNESCO in Promoting MIL

3.1. Provide policy and strategy guidance

UNESCO believes that countries should formulate appropriate policies and strategies to promote the popularization and enhancement of MIL. The “Media and Information Literacy Policy and Strategy Guidelines”, released in 2013, aim to support Member States to integrate these guidelines with local realities through open and inclusive national consultations, and to formulate comprehensive policies and strategies on MIL related to access to information, freedom of expression, cultural and religious dialogue, media, libraries, education, digital technology, and youth empowerment. Empowerment. According to UNESCO, there are six elements that can be taken into account in developing a MIL policy [1]. (1) vision, which creates a vision for MIL, its role and purpose; (2) consensus, which, due to the interdisciplinary nature of MIL, makes it incumbent on governments, civil society and individuals to engage in a “cross-cutting policy framework” that is participatory and consensual. Consensus will cover education policy, communication and technology, culture and other areas of public administration. (3) Addressing challenges, i.e. identifying the challenges faced by stakeholders in implementing MIL projects and developing principles to address them; (4) Incentives, i.e. defining incentive-based MIL policy directions; (5) Competency requirements, i.e. defining the knowledge, attitudes and skills required to implement MIL; allocating the resources required to implement MIL, from the micro to the macro level, but also including the existing media, ICT, infrastructure, financial resources, human resources, etc.; and (6) Developing a “cross-cutting policy framework”, i.e. a “cross-sectoral policy framework”. infrastructure, financial resources, human resources, etc.; and (6) action plans, which develop detailed action plans at the national, provincial and state, and institutional levels to provide guidance for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of MIL. Different countries and regions can develop specific MIL policies based on the above six dimensions, taking into account local realities. Policy makers and key stakeholders are responsible for coordinating strategies and activities in this area to ensure effective implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

3.2. Guidance on conducting MIL assessments

In 2013, UNESCO released the “Global Media and Information Literacy Assessment Framework: country readiness and competencies” (hereafter referred to as the Framework), which puts forward the theoretical basis and methodology for assessing the national status of MIL, the existing literacy capacity of citizens, and especially the current status of current teachers and teachers in training at the national level, and serves as a self-assessment tool to measure a country's readiness for MIL before taking action as well as its existing literacy levels. It is a self-assessment tool

for measuring a country's MIL readiness for action and current literacy levels, and contributes to the formulation and development of national policies and strategies.

The Framework adopts a “two-tier analysis”, i.e. it consists of two sets of indicators. The first tier assesses the national level and includes five dimensions: media and information literacy education, media and information literacy policies, media and information literacy resources, media and information literacy access and use, and civil society. The second tier is assessed from the individual citizen level, with a special focus on teachers' MIL competencies. The three main areas are Access and Retrieval, Understanding and Evaluation, and Creating and Sharing; and the three main elements of Attitude, Knowledge, and Skills are also considered. The Framework provides a list of specific tools and a six-step process for adapting UNESCO's MIL assessment framework at the national level [2]. It is adapted to each country's situation during the implementation process. By assessing a country's media and information literacy readiness and the capacity of individuals and organisations to take action, targeted policies and programmes can be developed to improve the level of media and information literacy in the country as a whole.

3.3. MIL Education and Resource Development

Nearly 60% of the world's population uses the Internet, yet large-scale and sustainable MIL training for all is still insufficient. UNESCO has prepared and released a series of resources to support global MIL education and development. Teacher development is the first step in developing MIL education. In 2011, UNESCO released the “Media and information literacy curriculum for teachers”[3], which provides a framework for the MIL curriculum and core competencies for teachers. In 2017, the “Five Laws of MIL” [4] were released, which lays the theoretical cornerstone for MIL education and promotion. Based on the previous research and work, in 2019, UNESCO published “Global Guidelines for Media and Information Literacy Curriculum Development Guidelines” [5], which provides a unified educational standard for policymakers, media, libraries, digital platforms, education and training institutions, and NGOs. In 2021, UNESCO published “Media and information literate citizens: think critically, click wisely!” [6], which provides detailed descriptions of the learning outcomes and teaching methods related to each of the above competencies.

In addition to publications, resolutions, recommendations, and declarations related to MIL education, UNESCO has developed a comprehensive MIL toolkit that includes audiovisual resources [7], partner-developed resources [7], mooc (five currently available) [8], and multimedia teaching and learning resource tools (developed in collaboration with UNAOC) [9], and so on. An international, multimedia and multilingual MIL teaching resource tool for educators, researchers and individuals.

3.4. Building a Global Collaboration and Promotion Network

UNESCO has developed global collaboration and promotion networks in the field of media and information literacy (MIL). These include the “UNESCO Media and Information Literacy Alliance”[10], the “Media and Information Literacy and Intercultural Dialogue University Network” [11], the “Media & Information Literacy Clearinghouse”[12], the establishment of MIL Awareness Weeks and Awards, and social media-based MIL enhancement [13], among others. These initiatives aim to promote the global development of MIL, raise public awareness of MIL, enhance the

promotion of MIL in formal and non-formal education, and use emerging platforms such as social media to enhance MIL. Through these efforts, UNESCO is committed to promoting information exchange and cross-cultural dialogue on a global scale, and enhancing public information literacy and media literacy.

4. Summary and Implications

The concept of UNESCO media and information literacy and a series of practices have provided new perspectives and ways for information literacy education in China. While traditional information literacy education focuses on retrieval skills and methods, the MIL proposed by UNESCO emphasises the comprehensive quality of individuals in a media-integrated environment. Information literacy education in China also needs to update its concept and carry out relevant research and practice with an interdisciplinary perspective.

4.1. Establish and Improve Relevant Policies and Standards

At the beginning of its promotion of MIL, UNESCO issued two major programme documents, the “Media and Information Literacy Policy and Strategy Guidelines” and the “Global Media and Information Literacy Assessment Framework: country readiness and competencies”. Countries and regions leading in information literacy education, such as the United States and Europe, have attached great importance to the formulation of policies and standards. At present, the relevant policies, standards and norms in China are not sound, and there is a lack of specific policy programmes and implementation standards. China can refer to the MIL policy guidelines and assessment framework issued by UNESCO, set up a national-level steering committee and assessment team, design an assessment programme, adapt the documents and tools provided by UNESCO in line with China’s strategic objectives, carry out MIL assessment at the national and individual levels, and formulate MIL with Chinese characteristics development strategy and implementation programme with Chinese characteristics, clarify the objectives of MIL education, the main parties involved, relevant principles, competence requirements, guarantees, action plans, etc., so as to provide macro-guidance and direction for the promotion of MIL.

4.2. Encourage multi-party participation

UNESCO promotes MIL in an interdisciplinary way, emphasising horizontal and vertical multi-party cooperation and participation. Horizontal mainly refers to the exchanges and co-operation among MIL researchers, experts and practitioners, and vertical mainly refers to the participation and co-operation of government, academia and education, civil society and communities. The development and implementation of MIL education in China likewise relies on the joint efforts of multi-stakeholders. Among them, government authorities ensure that all citizens have equal opportunities to receive MIL education by formulating and implementing relevant policies, providing programmes and funding, etc. Educational institutions at all levels play a central role in MIL education, from primary and secondary schools to universities, by providing courses and training to develop students’ ability to think critically and to access, evaluate and utilise information effectively. Libraries, industry associations, etc. popularise MIL knowledge and skills by providing training, holding lectures, organising academic research and practice exchanges, and conducting community activities. In addition, non-governmental organisations, enterprises, families and communities are involved in MIL education and popularisation in different ways.

4.3. Multi-pronged Education Strategy

UNESCO has been emphasising the inclusion and equity of MIL education, i.e. lifelong learning opportunities for all citizens. At present, China's information literacy education is mainly based on school education, and the overall development is unbalanced, unable to cover different age groups and different occupational groups. Therefore, a multi-pronged education strategy can be adopted to cover education targets of different levels, ages and occupations through diversified curriculum design.

The education targets include (1) formal education level (primary, secondary and tertiary education); (2) informal education at the individual level, such as self-study, mooc, open educational resources, etc.; (3) community level, such as training activities in public libraries; community mini-classes, etc.; and (4) occupational environments, personalised training for different occupational groups. (5) Focus on marginalised or disadvantaged groups in society so that they can also participate and benefit. (6) Teacher education and training, in the context of lifelong learning and vocational training, through the "train-the-trainer" model, to continuously build up a diverse team of media and information literacy trainers/services. Curriculum design can take the form of stand-alone MIL courses, embedded courses, workplace-based training, multi-media-based learning (e.g., Internet, radio, TV, etc.), home-based learning, etc.

4.4. Innovative teaching methods and content

4.4.1. Adoption of multiple learner-centred teaching methods

Teaching and learning in MIL focuses on participation and practice, and emphasises a learner-centred approach to learning, focusing on the development of interdisciplinary knowledge and skills, as well as critical thinking and problem-solving skills. In the MIL curriculum programme released by UNESCO, constructivist learning, transformative learning, collaborative learning, interdisciplinary learning, and personalised and customised learning are taken as the teaching and learning framework, and a variety of teaching and learning methods, such as problem-based inquiry, case study, collaborative learning, reflective practice, and experiential learning, are used in an integrated way. Based on the characteristics of MIL education, which emphasises knowledge and practice, as well as educational theories such as constructivism, China's MIL education should re-examine the original passive teaching, which is mainly based on "teaching", and carry out learner-centred, problem-based, inspirational, disciplinary, situational, and practice-oriented design of teaching methods. For example, the MIL academic training camp carried out by the Shanghai International Studies University Library designs theme-based learning around MIL, practices the concept of learner-centred teaching and learning, in which learners determine part of the theme, solve problems, make decisions, and carry out MIL teaching activities in a variety of forms, such as lectures, trainings, workshops, competitions, projects, and practices [14]. In terms of form, it can be online, offline or a combination of online and offline [15]. Online mainly includes the use of comprehensive online teaching platforms to open relevant courses such as mooc, B station courses, micro-courses, micro-videos, etc.; offline mainly includes relevant courses, training, practice at all levels and in all types of schools, lectures in all types of libraries and communities, simulation and practical training activities.

4.4.2. Expanding Teaching Content

In the design of MIL teaching content, the “Media and information literacy curriculum for teachers” issued by UNESCO puts forward three major content themes: “Knowledge and understanding of media and information in the context of democratic dialogue and social participation, assessment of media texts and information sources, and production and use of media and information”, and nine core modules [3] are designed. There are nine core modules [3], which cover a number of key areas of media and information literacy. From the understanding of basic concepts such as citizenship and freedom of expression, to in-depth analyses of journalism, media ethics, information reproduction, language application, and advertising operations, to the comparison between new and traditional media, the opportunities and challenges brought by the Internet, as well as the cultivation of information literacy and library skills, each module builds up a complete body of knowledge of MIL. Together, this series of modules forms a comprehensive and systematic framework for media and information literacy education. Teachers and training organisations can choose specific modules according to their teaching targets at different levels, ages and occupations.

4.5. Strengthening International Co-operation and Exchange

China’s MIL education should also be in line with the international standards, open up the international vision, and open up international cooperation and exchange. (1) Actively participate in international MIL-related organisations to understand the latest global MIL dynamics and trends. (2) Co-operate in projects and researches, share resources, technologies and experiences, and improve capabilities and levels. (3) Mutual sending of visiting scholars and international students to strengthen academic exchanges and co-operation between China and its international partners in the field of MIL, and to promote the flow of knowledge and talents. (4) Participate in and organise international conferences to exchange and share the latest research results and trends, and enhance China’s international influence in this field. (5) Strengthen the cultivation of language ability, improve the cross-linguistic communication ability of citizens, and make better use of international resources to promote the development of MIL in our country. (6) To learn from advanced experiences and best practices, so as to make less detours and improve the level of media and information literacy in our country more quickly.

5. Conclusions

As countries around the world become increasingly aware of the vulnerability caused by the spread of disinformation and the importance of access to accurate and timely information, MIL, as a growing field, is gaining importance on important global and national agendas. Building on the results of the previous period and taking into account national contexts, we will further strengthen our implementation capacity and take advantage of the many opportunities, especially for interdisciplinary work, to promote in-depth practice and development of MIL and literacy theories globally.

Conflicts of Interest

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