

The Future of Digital Education: A Policy Analysis of Finland's 'National Media Education Policy' and Media Literacy Issues

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Introduction

This is an era of profound transformation. Over the past four decades, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has progressed at an unprecedented rate, leading to a society where technology, information, and media are inextricably intertwined. On a daily basis, an immense volume of new content is generated online, encompassing unverified information, misleading news, hate speech with racist undertones, and even overt instances of cyberbullying and sexual harassment.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recognized the importance of Media and Information Literacy (MIL) as early as 2008, defining it as a comprehensive set of competencies needed for living, working, and learning in today's world. Media literacy refers to the knowledge, skills, and information related to media. It encompasses the ability to access, interpret, produce, and create information for various purposes. Additionally, it includes skills such as media usage, information searching, media criticism, communication and interaction, participation, and influence. Media literacy also overlaps with many other concepts, such as multiculturalism, media education, media skills, or information literacy.

Young people need support and guidance to develop high levels of

information and media literacy to survive amidst the flood of uncontrolled online material(Sauerteig,et al. 2019) . Media literacy education has thus become a crucial educational issue in the digital era. It equips adolescents to navigate the complex environment where information, media, and communication converge seamlessly.

Today, Finland stands out globally as a model for media literacy education, earning a stellar reputation and playing a leading role in promoting collaboration on media literacy across Europe. Finland is renowned not only for its long history of media education but also for its success in developing media literacy into a comprehensive cross-sectoral initiative. In 2019, Finland's Ministry of Education and Culture released the *National Media Education Policy* , a comprehensive framework highlighting the government's ongoing focus on addressing the changes and challenges within the field of media literacy education. This policy aims to enhance the digital competencies of citizens, including adolescents, and mitigate the negative impacts of digitalization, such as cyberbullying and information manipulation. This report situates the policy within Finland's rich tradition of media education, providing an overview of its historical development and evaluating its implementation outcomes.

Context

Policy Background and Overview

Since the 1950s, Finland has continuously explored and developed media literacy education. Over the course of more than seventy years, Finland has advanced media literacy education through a series of national policies, promoting diversity, inclusivity, and comprehensiveness. Media literacy curricula have been integrated

into the foundational education system. In December 2019, the **Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC)** introduced the new **National Media Education Policy**, which outlined the background and development goals of Finland's media literacy education. The policy also emphasized areas requiring further improvement and highlighted trends in social, cultural, and technological development.

Implementation Context

The introduction and implementation of the National Media Education Policy in 2019 responded both to domestic pressures within Finland and timely international demands.

By the 2010s, the Finnish government recognized that effective media literacy education could enhance democratic participation and foster healthy democratic discourse (Giannetto, 2023). As a result, Finland began providing greater national-level support for media literacy education, incorporating it into various policies. In 2013, Finland issued its first media literacy policy, the **Cultural Policy Guidelines**, marking the beginning of a new phase in its media literacy education efforts. However, as media environments grew increasingly diverse with the integration of technologies like artificial intelligence and algorithms, the Finnish government realized the growing importance of media in society and democracy. Additionally, the need to combat misinformation and ensure citizens' access to diverse and reliable information became increasingly apparent.

On the international level, the 2018 EU Directive 2018/1808, article 33a, stated: "Member States shall promote and take measures for the development of media literacy skills" (The EU, 2018). This amendment to the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) specifically prioritized

developing media literacy initiatives to combat misinformation. In response, Finland's government, in a July 2018 resolution, recognized the need to update its media literacy policy. The resolution highlighted the importance of equipping citizens with the skills necessary to protect themselves from systematic and targeted disinformation, anti-democratic messages, hate speech, cyberbullying, sexual harassment, and violations of personal privacy. In 2019, the revised **National Media Education Policy** was officially launched to address the challenges of a diverse media environment. The policy envisions a Finland where opportunities to develop media literacy are improved for everyone.

Policy Analysis Framework

A comprehensive analysis of Finland's 2019 National Media Education Policy requires examining not only the social context and background of its formation but also the content of the policy itself and the evaluation of its practical implementation. The policy analysis framework proposed by Tyler et al. (1997) provides a clear logical structure for this purpose, focusing on three key dimensions: context, text, and consequences.

Specifically:

- The **context** dimension examines the environment in which Finland's media education policy was developed, as well as the domestic and international driving forces behind it.
- The **text** dimension analyzes the development process of the policy and the manner in which it is articulated.
- The **consequences** dimension evaluates the implementation outcomes of the policy at different levels (macro, meso, and micro) and assesses its potential impacts.

Text

Policy Development

This section explores the development of media literacy policy in Finland, highlighting the foundational framework established through institutional support and collaboration, the initial steps taken with the policy's introduction in 2013, and the transformative shift brought about by the National Media Education Policy in 2019. It also assesses the alignment of this policy with the OECD's framework on public trust and critically examines media coverage of the policy. Through this analysis, we gain insight into Finland's comprehensive efforts to cultivate media literacy and its approach to addressing the challenges of the digital age.

Foundational Framework: Institutional and Collaborative Support

In 2012, the **National Audiovisual Institute (KAVI)** was officially established as a subsidiary of the **Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC)**. Its responsibilities include ensuring a safe media environment, promoting and advancing children's media education, and providing information on media-related issues. KAVI collaborates with other governmental departments and industries to promote research and monitor international developments in the field of media literacy education.

Initial Exploration: The 2013 Policy and Its Impact

Although Finland's government had mentioned "media literacy education" in its 2004 cultural policy, there was no substantive policy document until 2013. The **Cultural Policy Guidelines to Promote Media Literacy**, drafted by the MoEC, became Finland's first formal media literacy education policy. The guidelines were rooted in Finland's national strategy outlined in

the **Government Plan** (MoEC, 2013) and aligned with the principles of the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**, emphasizing the connection between media literacy and children's rights to information, self-expression, and social participation.

This policy aimed to address the challenges of a diverse media environment by updating media education methods and focusing on improving the well-being of children and adolescents. Key goals included teaching safe internet use, reducing cyberbullying, and promoting social engagement.

While the 2013 policy provided legitimacy, stakeholder clarity, objectives, and a framework for implementing media education, it also had notable limitations:

- The policy focused primarily on internet usage skills, such as safe online behavior, while neglecting critical thinking and media evaluation skills—the core of media literacy.
- Definitions of media literacy were inconsistent, with insufficient attention given to the societal impacts of misinformation and manipulation.
- The policy's scope was limited to children and adolescents (MoEC, 2013), excluding other demographic groups and contradicting the principle of educational equality.

Overall, the 2013 policy laid the groundwork for media literacy education but required improvements in coverage and critical skill development.

Evolutionary Opportunity: Policy Transition from 2013 to 2019

In 2018, the **EU Directive 2018/1808** mandated member states to promote media literacy. In response, Finland introduced a new media policy initiative, aligning its standards with the EU. This initiative aimed to address challenges in the dynamic digital media landscape, focusing on critical media literacy for adults and vulnerable groups while enhancing society's resilience against threats.

In 2019, the MoEC released the **National Media Education Policy**,

developed by KAVI, which replaced the 2013 cultural policy. The updated policy addressed prior shortcomings by focusing on societal issues like misinformation, anti-democratic discourse, and hate speech. It also expanded the target audience to include all age groups, offering comprehensive, high-quality, and systematic media literacy education (OKM, 2019).

Public Trust and the OECD Framework

The implementation of educational policies relies heavily on public trust. Using the **OECD (2021) Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions**, Finland's 2019 **National Media Education Policy** demonstrates success in building trust within a challenging digital environment.

Partnerships and Relationships

Finland's media literacy policy focuses on co-operation. Cross-sectoral co-operation between government agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), educational institutions and schools demonstrates the relevance of the policy to the needs of different groups of people in media literacy education, and in this way it demonstrates the integrity integrity and responsiveness of the policy, and gives the public the assurance that the government's implementation of the policy is comprehensive, fair and effective. Media Literacy in Finland

Finland's 2019 National Media Education Policy emphasises that the key to successful implementation of media literacy education is cross-sector collaboration, in which the Ministry of Education and Culture promotes media literacy education through the allocation of resources and information guidance.

The **National Audiovisual Institute (KAVI)** has a statutory mandate to promote media literacy education, and its Department of Media Education

and Audiovisual Media is responsible for promoting and coordinating media education at the national level, as well as supervising all types of audiovisual programmes from the point of view of child protection; the **Finnish National Agency for Education (NFAE)** plays a key role in the promotion of media literacy in formal schooling, determines the core curriculum for media literacy in basic, upper secondary and vocational education, and provides support to those working in the field of media literacy. In addition to government departments that have a statutory obligation for media literacy education, **non-government organisations (NGOs)** that have a vested interest in supporting media literacy education are also using non-formal learning pathways to enhance citizens' media literacy. Nearly 100 different organisations across the country, such as the **Finnish Society of Media Education**, are working to promote media literacy education, and they are communicating their experiences of media literacy education both internationally and nationally through a variety of online and offline means. These organisations act as intermediaries, connecting policymakers with local communities.

Accountability and Transparency

The Finnish government ensures the openness of its policies by involving the public in their development, providing access to policy content, and offering feedback on their implementation. This approach aligns with the OECD (2021) framework's emphasis on "providing open and accessible information so the public better understands what government is doing," demonstrating the government's accountability in achieving its policy objectives.

During the policy formulation stage, the government conducted public online surveys to gather input from citizens and interviewed several experts in the field of media education. This process ensured the policy included a balanced

analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the current state of media literacy education, while also providing a realistic forecast of future challenges. Additionally, to enhance transparency, the draft policy was published on the government's website (lausuntopalvelu.fi) for public consultation before its finalization. A total of 71 respondents submitted feedback, which significantly shaped the policy's final content.

Following its enactment, the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) tasked the National Audiovisual Institute (KAVI) with regularly evaluating the policy's implementation. This evaluation includes online surveys and expert panel discussions. Such transparency provides stakeholders with clear information on the progress and outcomes of the policy, thereby fostering public trust.

Critical Analysis of Policy Representation in Media

The 2019 National Media Education Policy has received widespread positive coverage in the media, with particular praise for its inclusivity. Its goal to provide media literacy education to individuals across all age groups is often highlighted as a significant achievement. For instance, CNN lauded the policy as one of the leading practices in global media literacy education, emphasizing its critical role in safeguarding Western democracies by equipping citizens with the tools to navigate an increasingly complex digital landscape (Mackintosh, 2019).

Overall, media coverage has played a pivotal role in enhancing public acceptance of the policy. By emphasizing the policy's theoretical objectives and potential impacts, the media has contributed to bolstering public confidence in the government and relevant institutions, facilitating smoother policy implementation. Positive narratives have also strengthened the legitimacy of the policy in the eyes of various stakeholders, including educators, policymakers, and community organizations, further encouraging

cross-sectoral collaboration.

However, media representation has predominantly focused on the policy's aspirational goals and anticipated outcomes, while offering limited attention to its practical implementation and the challenges faced in achieving those goals. This selective reporting creates a perception that the policy's objectives have been universally realized, potentially overlooking issues such as regional disparities, resource allocation challenges, and the need for continuous professional development among educators.

From a critical perspective, this tendency toward selective attention reflects inherent biases in media reporting. By prioritizing the success stories and theoretical strengths of the policy, the media risks neglecting the nuanced complexities and limitations encountered during its execution. For instance, challenges related to engaging marginalized communities, addressing resource shortages in rural areas, and integrating critical thinking skills across all levels of education remain underexplored in public discourse.

While positive media coverage has undeniably contributed to the policy's visibility and credibility, a more balanced representation that includes both achievements and challenges would offer a fuller picture of its impact. Such comprehensive reporting could foster greater public understanding and engagement, while encouraging stakeholders to address gaps in implementation and strive for further improvements.

Policy Implementation

Practical Execution of the Policy

Finland's National Media Education Policy employs cross-sectoral collaboration and tiered implementation strategies, encompassing macro, meso, and micro levels. Each level plays a unique role in the policy's design and execution, forming a systematic pathway from national strategic

guidance to localized implementation.

At the **Macro level**, the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) provides the overarching framework and strategic direction for the policy through legislation and funding allocation. The Finnish National Audiovisual Institute (KAVI), a subsidiary of MoEC, is tasked with developing national implementation plans for media literacy education and overseeing cross-sectoral collaboration. MoEC ensures sustainable and diverse resource allocation through national budgets, supporting schools, libraries, and other educational institutions. A notable feature of this level is inter-departmental collaboration: for example, the Ministry of Justice emphasizes reducing hate speech through media literacy, while the Ministry of Culture focuses on leveraging cultural resources to promote media education. This level ensures clear strategic direction, providing legal, financial, and strategic support to various institutions.

At the **Meso level**, the policy is implemented regionally through local educational institutions and library networks. Local governments tailor policy implementation to regional needs, such as developing educational resources suitable for local languages and cultures. Libraries serve as core institutions for media literacy education, offering programs tailored to adults and the elderly while promoting regional initiatives. However, geographic and economic disparities create challenges, with remote areas struggling to access resources and training equivalent to urban regions, a critical issue evident at the meso level.

At the **Micro level**, the policy's implementation relies on schools, communities, and NGOs, which directly engage with the public. Schools integrate media literacy into core curricula, cultivating students' critical thinking and digital skills from early childhood to secondary education. KAVI supports teachers by providing free online resources and training materials to help deliver media literacy programs. NGOs, such as the Finnish Media Education Society, promote media education online and within communities,

focusing particularly on remote and disadvantaged groups. Libraries and schools employ interactive teaching methods to help participants better understand and apply media literacy concepts. This level ensures that the policy reaches all target groups, creating tangible impacts in everyday life.

Through strategic guidance at the national level, coordinated implementation at the regional level, and localized execution at the grassroots level, Finland's media education policy is systematically implemented. This multi-tiered approach not only enhances the policy's reach and adaptability but also ensures a solid foundation for achieving comprehensive media literacy.

Barriers to Policy Implementation

The current policies highlight several challenges encountered in media literacy education.

A significant issue is **the insufficient availability of educational resources**, which are essential for hiring educators, developing individual capabilities, and organizing media literacy activities. As van der Linden (2023) notes that Students achieve the best outcomes in media literacy education through regular and repeated training . However, due to limited resources, many media literacy education programs are short-term and unsustainable. To address this, leveraging the internet and information-sharing platforms can help conserve resources, while the government should allocate more resources in the early stages of budget planning (MoEC, 2013).

Resource distribution inequalities also reveal regional disparities in Finland's media education. The geographic dispersion of media education participants may hinder coordination and cooperation. Furthermore, professional resources in media education tend to concentrate in urban areas, leaving rural regions underserved. Addressing this requires greater emphasis on digital collaboration tools and technologies to bridge resource gaps.

Additionally, **the capabilities of media literacy educators and**

stakeholders need significant improvement to address the dynamic and diverse digital media environment. Training programs and updated publications should be developed and disseminated to ensure all stakeholders can effectively implement the policy.

Effectiveness of Implementation Strategies

Despite its limitations, the overall implementation strategy has demonstrated high efficiency and achieved its intended outcomes, with the primary goal of enhancing universal media literacy largely realized.

The effectiveness of Finland's policy lies in its broad coverage of target groups. By utilizing public institutions such as schools and libraries, the policy ensures that people across different age groups—from preschool children to the elderly—can access media literacy education. Free online resources provided by KAVI and localized support from NGOs significantly enhance the policy's practicality and accessibility. Furthermore, the success of the policy stems from cross-sectoral collaboration among the MoEC, KAVI, local governments, and NGOs, ensuring a seamless transition from policy design to implementation.

Policy Outcomes and Impacts

The implementation of Finland's National Media Education Policy has solidified the country's leading position in global media literacy development. According to the 2022 Media Pluralism Monitor, Finland's media literacy risk score was only 4%, a testament to the strength of its media literacy policies. Media literacy education in Finland is prominent not only in formal education but also in informal settings, with adults and seniors benefiting from these programs alongside children and adolescents.

Statistics from Eurostat reveal that over three-quarters of Finns possess basic

or above-basic digital skills (Eurostat, 2022). Moreover, a 2019 study by the Stanford History Education Group (SHEG) assessed media literacy skills among students in Finland and the United States, focusing on digital reasoning abilities such as evaluating the reliability of information sources and gathering evidence. The findings showed Finnish students significantly outperformed their American counterparts (Horn and Veermans, 2019), demonstrating Finland's success in equipping students with the skills to resist the dangers of misinformation.

Recommendations

Finland's 2019 National Media Education Policy has demonstrated the advantages of multi-stakeholder collaboration and flexible implementation, achieving its fundamental objectives. To foster a more inclusive and progressive landscape for media literacy education, greater efforts are required to ensure equality in media education.

To promote equality in media education, further research on media literacy education is needed to develop new approaches and models. These research findings should be disseminated across various sectors, targeting audiences of different ages and from diverse regions. Additionally, addressing the issue of insufficient educational resources calls for more detailed information about target groups, including their knowledge levels, needs, and media usage patterns, to better implement media education and secure financial support for it.

Moreover, ensuring equality in the implementation of media literacy education requires not only Finland's legal safeguards but also heightened awareness among policymakers and media education practitioners about this issue. Enhancing accessibility and equality in media education hinges on recognizing its importance and actively addressing the challenges involved.

Conclusion

The achievements of Finland in media literacy education are inseparable from the support and safeguards provided by its media literacy education policies. From the evolution and overall framework of Finland's 2019 National Media Education Policy, it is evident that these policies have offered direction and guidance, steering media literacy education toward universality, diversity, and comprehensiveness. The policy aligns closely with the OECD (2021) framework, emphasizing the importance of accountability, participation, and clear communication in building trust. By addressing existing challenges and fostering continuous innovation, Finland has provided a robust model for other countries to enhance public trust in educational policies.

However, Finland's media literacy education policy is not without its shortcomings. While the policy recognizes the importance of cross-sectoral collaboration, its implementation lacks effective coordination with non-governmental organizations and other societal forces. This gap hinders the optimal integration of resources, potentially leading to fragmentation and inequality in media literacy education.

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