

Comparative Analysis of Media Literacy Education for Adolescents (15-17) in Finland, Wales, and China: Preparing Adolescents for the Complexities of the Social Media Landscape

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Background & Context

The rapid growth of social media over the past decade or so has brought about many changes in the environment in which adolescents are growing up. Social media, including social networks and instant messaging software, have become very popular among adolescents (Vogels et al., 2022). However, at the same time, the risks faced by adolescents related to disinformation, social comparison, and cyberbullying have gradually increased. Narjes Gerace et al. (2015) note that media literacy education allows adolescents to react positively and critically to media messages. Therefore, media literacy education is the best way to protect adolescents from harmful influences.

WHO defines the age of adolescents as 10-19 years, with late adolescents aged 15-19 years. Adolescents in the late adolescent stage are experiencing more physical and cognitive development, developing a stronger sense of self-identity and beginning to form more complex social relationships than before. According to Brundidge and Sigman (2021) have also note that adolescents between the ages of 15 and 19 use social media more for socialising, information gathering and self-expression than they did in the earlier stages of adolescence. Research has also shown that adolescents in this age group are active on multiple platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok, and have more complex usage patterns (Frey and Friemel, 2023). And within the range of LATE adolescents, the 15-17 year old stage is a transitional period of greater reliance on educators and parental guidance. In the UK, 15-17 year olds are usually at GCSE and A-level, while in Finland and China, 15-17 year olds are usually in high school, and in all three cultures, this period is a critical time when adolescents are most strongly influenced by education. Therefore, in this study I will set the scope of my research to late adolescents (15-17 years old), and by focusing on this age group I can gain insights into how media literacy education affects adolescents' media use and critical engagement with sources of information - which is an important aspect of media literacy education.

This study examines the integration and effectiveness of media literacy education in three different educational and cultural settings: Finland, Wales and China. Each region has adopted a unique approach to media literacy education, providing an ideal basis for comparative analyses.

Finland is often cited in international comparisons as a leader in promoting media literacy education, and its media literacy education system is supported by the state and the government. Media education in Finland is comprehensive, of high-quality, and systematic(Salomaa and Palsa, 2019). Finland is an example of an advanced media literacy model in this study.

Wales, Despite being part of the UK, Wales can serve as a paradigm for independent research due to its autonomous education system. The Welsh Government's interest in media literacy education has also experienced significant growth in recent years. , and in 2016 the Welsh Government enacted *the Digital Competence Framework*, which is a mandatory element of the National Curriculum for Wales, and which provides a taxonomy of digital literacy skills to be taught through formal education(Polizzi et al. 2024). This makes it an evolving case study between Finland's advanced model and China's emerging concerns.

China is a rapidly developing country with a diverse digital ecosystem, but media literacy education is an emerging field in China(Cheung and Xu, 2014). Cases on media literacy education in the context of Asia are scarce, and research on media literacy education in China is still in its nascent stage. Therefore, studying media literacy education in China offers a fresh perspective to this field.

Aims & Objectives

This study aims to underscore the efficacy of media literacy education in fostering critical engagement with social media among 15-17-year-old adolescents (late adolescence) within diverse educational and cultural contexts, through a comparative evaluation of three regions: Finland, Wales, and China. The objective is to discern variations in the effectiveness of media literacy education across different regions and offer valuable insights for areas where the development of media literacy systems lags behind, thereby addressing emerging challenges.

Objectives:

1. To examine the current landscape of media literacy education for adolescents aged 15 to 17 in Finland, Wales, and China, with a particular emphasis on pertinent educational policies, implementation strategies, and curriculum design.

2. To examine how adolescents aged 15-17 in three distinct cultural and policy environments currently utilize social media, as well as to investigate the extent to which various contexts of media literacy education influence the effectiveness of critical engagement and safe practices regarding social media among teenagers. Furthermore, the research seeks to assess the impact of social media usage on this demographic.
3. To examine how policymakers and educators in three distinct regions are addressing the challenges and risks presented by the rapidly evolving digital age, as well as how they are reconciling media literacy with adolescent education.
4. To investigate and comprehend the challenges and complexities associated with the implementation of media literacy education in these three regions, while proposing potential measures for improvement.
5. To assess the deficiencies in media literacy education in underdeveloped regions by conducting a comparative analysis of Finland and Wales, while offering recommendations for areas currently establishing their own media literacy education systems. The aim is to enhance adolescent's critical thinking and judgment towards media, thereby addressing existing challenges and gaps.

Proposed methodology

This study will use mixed-methods in order to match the complexity of the topic itself. The research will combine qualitative and quantitative research, including policy document analysis, comparative case study approach and interviews in qualitative research and surveys and texting in quantitative research. To ensure a comprehensive understanding of the different media literacy education in the three cultural, policy and historical contexts.

Firstly, with regard to qualitative research, according to Cardno (2019) notes that policy document analysis is a highly important research method, which can be utilized not only by educational leaders but also as a practical pedagogical research approach. The study of policy involves understanding what is behind educational policies, what causes them to come into being, as well as understanding the purpose for which the policies are set and the ways in which they can be made more effective. In this study, it is important to analyse the policies on media literacy education in the three districts, the policies that regulate young people's use of social media, and the policies related to media literacy education in schools, communities, and educational organisations specifically, as it will help to define the framework and scope of media literacy education policies, help to understand the design of curricula and pedagogical approaches, and to understand differences in media literacy policies and how specific policies are implemented in practice. It will help the study to define the framework and scope of media literacy education policies, to understand curriculum design and pedagogy, to understand the

differences between different media literacy education policies, and to understand how specific policies differ from the ideal in practice.

The Comparative Case study approach aims to compare and contrast different cases in order to understand the similarities and differences that exist. This research method is therefore well suited for cross-national research to compare relevant policies and social phenomena. Therefore an in-depth study of media literacy education in Finland, Wales and China in this research will fit well with this research approach, and by comparing these three cases, the research will highlight the uniqueness and challenges related to media literacy education, which will help to provide effective insights and suggestions for improvement in the research.

In this study, I also plan to use interviews as a research method, including semi-structured interviews and group interviewing. The advantages of interviews include the possibility of establishing a more positive communication relationship between interviewer and interviewee, as well as the possibility of exploring the topic in more depth and avoiding some of the ambiguities that can arise from complex issues, in order to explore the topic in a more direct way. Regarding group interviewing, bogdan and biklen (1997) believe that group interviewing can help to add more in-depth content than individual interviews. At the same time, group interviewing can save time more effectively. Therefore, in this study, I plan to firstly conduct individual interviews and group interviewing with adolescent participants in each of the three regions in order to gain more in-depth understanding of their media usage habits and their experiences of media literacy education and attitudes towards it. In addition, I will interview media literacy education curriculum designers, curriculum participants, and related educators in each region, aiming to understand their perceptions of the effectiveness of media literacy education practices and educational goals.

In addition to qualitative research, quantitative research is also an integral part of this study. The two research methods designed for the study, survey and test, can be used to collect and quantify adolescents' media literacy competence, frequency of social media use, and ability to critically engage with online information.

The survey can collect data uploaded by youth of the appropriate age in the three regions themselves, in order to collect the differences in the same competencies in different regions, thus revealing the differences in the results of media literacy education in different regions. Tests can objectively measure certain media literacy competencies, such as the ability to identify false information, the ability to distinguish between misinformation and disinformation, and the judgement of media bias, by administering a series of uniform tests to 15-17 year olds in different regions. The results obtained from these tests will be more objective and reliable than the data obtained from a single qualitative study.

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