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of Artificial Intelligence*

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Adult media literacy as an andragogical issue – an overview study

Michaela Beran Sládkayová, Miroslav Krystoň

Abstracts:

This paper deals with the current state of research into adult media literacy as an integral part of the theory and practice of citizenship education of adults in the context of an analysis of some key international and national strategic documents. The authors strived to identify media literacy and its elements in the selected national and international documents. The research sample consisted of 5 important strategic documents, which influence the implementation of citizenship education of adults as well as media literacy development in the adult population.

Key words:

media literacy, adult education, citizenship education, adults, overview study

1. Introduction

Today's world is full of stimuli generated by printed but now mainly electronic media. Lack of information is not a problem anymore. On the contrary, the problem is our ability to process this information effectively and evaluate it critically; in other words, its interpretation is necessary for a person to successfully integrate into their social and work life. This ability is one of the most important life skills and requires a certain level of media literacy, which is developed through formal and informal education. Media literacy is considered one of the key competences necessary for the 21st century (Glas et al., 2023).

In the context of formal education, media education can take the form of a separate academic subject or a cross-sectional topic integrated into the educational content at various levels of the education system. In the context of informal education, adults can develop media literacy within its subsystems.

Adult education has been attracting increasing attention. Mainly international structures (e.g., European Union, OECD, UNESCO) are putting increasingly more effort into supporting adult education. Citizenship education of adults has become particularly important and its goals can be summarised as follows:

1. development of social, citizenship, and intercultural competences by promoting democratic values and active citizenship;
2. improvement of critical thinking and media literacy to build resistance to discrimination and indoctrination;
3. support of education for disadvantaged citizens;
4. promotion of intercultural dialogue through all forms of education (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2016).

This classification implies that the development of media literacy has a legitimate position within the concept of citizenship education of adults and adult education in general. Citizenship education of adults comprises activities and education aimed to support active citizenship, i.e., to help citizens learn how to respond to social changes and develop citizenship competences (Krystoň & Sládkayová, 2018; Beran Sládkayová & Neusarová, 2022a, 2022b).

Based on the content analysis of relevant Slovak and foreign sources, it can be stated there is no single definition of media literacy. It can be summarised as follows: media literacy comprises the knowledge and skills necessary to process information resources, information search and analysis, understanding of the information collected, its critical evaluation, the ability to distinguish between actual and distorted information (authors' note: true and false information, dis/misinformation, etc.), comparison of news from different sources in order to develop an opinion or attitude to a specific issue (Rožukalne, Skulte & Stakle, 2020).

Media literacy refers to a set of “skills and abilities necessary for responsible media use. Media literacy integrates critical thinking and recipients’ attitudes to media and their contents in terms of moral principles and humanism, thus allowing them to use media for their own benefit to satisfy their own needs and interests” (Balážová, 2012, p. 7).

Although media literacy is often confused with media competence or media education, it is not a new concept or a phenomenon specific exclusively for today’s society. References to media literacy can be found in a variety of international documents, e.g., Grunwald Declaration (1982), Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), or European Charter for Media Literacy (2006) (according to Balážová, 2012). According to Glas et al (2023), Škripcová (2022), Belvončíková & Čiderová (2022), Cho et al. (2022), Rasi, Vuojärvi & Rivinen (2021) Kendall & McDougall (2012), this area is becoming increasingly important and gains attention. However, the current state of media literacy does not reflect its declared importance. Numerous studies point out that the development of media literacy is too slow and individuals (in all age groups) are becoming more susceptible to manipulation and sharing of false (unverified) information (Media Literacy Index, 2021). In the recent years marked by the pandemic, war in Ukraine and other social events, which influence the shape of society (authors’ note: in Slovakia, the recent parliamentary elections and creation of the new government). In general, people suffer from information and dis/misinformation overload, which creates mental pressure on the individual. Social media play a significant role in this aspect, as young adults use them constantly, which influences their behaviour and perception of the risks related to low media literacy. Young adults use social media to maintain relationships and tend to trust people within their personal network. University students use media to satisfy their needs related to entertainment and partially also as information sources (Eger et al, 2020).

Based on some disunity (in media literacy definitions) among media literacy experts (e.g., Koltay, 2011; Grombly & Anderson, 2020; Glas et. al., 2023), the increasing attention paid to this problem, and the facts explained above, this study aims to determine how national and international documents address the topic of media literacy.

2. Methods

This study presents an analysis of media literacy and its treatment in important strategic and legislative documents on the national and international levels. The partial goals were to identify the goals of media literacy and determine its importance.

Since this study employs a qualitative research design, two questions were formulated:

- 1) What are the goals of media literacy?
- 2) How do the documents analysed characterise the importance of media literacy?

To achieve the goals and answer the research questions, the method of content analysis was applied. Content analysis of documents can be used as a separate method or an additional to collect supplementary data via interviews or observation (Hendl, 2005). According to experts in research methodology (Hendl, 2005; Silverman, 2005, Gavora, 2006; Průcha, 2014), the basic types of documents used for content analysis are as follows:

- current documents,
- retrospective documents,
- primary documents,
- secondary documents,

This study analysed the current documents created by the European Union, UNESCO, UN, and other international organisations as well as Slovak national documents. The qualitative content analysis explains the contents of the text and identifies trends.

The research sample consisted of 5 documents, 2 were Slovak, and 3 internationals. An overview can be seen in the following table.

Table 1 List of the documents analysed in terms of content

| document type | document name | year of publication |
|---------------|--|---------------------|
| Slovak | The strategy for life-long learning and counselling for 2021–2030 | 2021 |
| | National programme for active ageing for 2021 – 2030 – NPAS II | 2021 |
| International | Council of Europe Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning – European reference framework | 2018 |
| | Manifesto for Adult Learning in the 21st Century: The Power and Joy of Learning | 2019 |
| | CONFINTEA VII Marrakech Framework for Action Harnessing the transformational power of Adult Learning and Education | 2022 |

Source: Own processing

The research sample was collected based on the following criteria:

1. document importance (national or international strategic document)
2. document topicality (published within last 5 years)
3. focus on adult population (primarily or partially)

As for quantity, there are fewer strategic documents on the national level than on the international one. In this aspect, the research sample is disproportional.

3. Results

The analysis of the selected national and international documents focused on the identification of the goals and importance level of media literacy. Each document will be presented separately and its description will include the specification of parts related to media literacy.

1) *The strategy for life-long learning and counselling for 2021–2030 (2021)*

This document defines two “Main areas” related to the accessibility of life-long learning (p. 6). In area no. 1 “Building an effective adult education system in the context of the culture of life-long learning in the Slovak Republic with the emphasis on supporting informal education and individualised approach”, “3 approaches to main intervention areas” were identified. One of them is focused on the “support for the selected skill areas”, which include the basic, transferrable, digital, and citizenship skills (p. 6). In the context of developing citizenship skills, “which do not get enough attention despite its importance for the state, citizenship skills including media and financial literacy help build trust towards the institutional system of the democratic society” (p. 9). Media literacy is explicitly specified in the enumeration of the “basic skills and key competences” comprised by the citizenship education of adults (p. 54), which also covers: “different types of literacy for practical life – digital, media literacy, financial literacy, consumer

literacy, health literacy, etc.”. The basic component of media literacy, i.e., development of critical thinking is also referred to. A contextual link can also be found between media literacy development and combating hybrid threats or even more general protection and security (ibid p. 54).

2) *National programme for active ageing for 2021 – 2030 – NPAS II*

Educational activities are not only an integral part of this programme, but also one of the domains pertaining to promotion of active ageing. From the perspective of education (including citizenship education of adults), domain no. 2 is of key importance: “Supporting human resources throughout the lifecycle”, specifically in Objective 3: Education geared towards older people, enhancing their employability or relevance in the labour market, which accepts the key trends of the fourth industrial revolution”. This Objective covers 3 measures:

Measure 1: Supporting the development and implementation of education programmes promoting key competences for life-long learning with an emphasis on digital literacy, personal development, and mental health in the context of the labour market and employment.

Measure 2: Implementation of the Digital Skills Development Programme for the Elderly within the Digital Coalition and by the IT Fitness Test

Measure 3: Implementation of financial literacy education programmes for the elderly through the established counselling points in client centres (pp.19–20).

3) *Council of Europe Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning – European reference framework (2018)*

Key competences are defined as those needed by all people for personal fulfilment and development, employability, social inclusion, sustainable lifestyle, successful living in a peaceful society, focus on health and responsible life management, and active citizenship (p.7). In this document, media literacy is explicitly specified in the description of the digital competence:

1. The digital competence includes not only the general ability to operate digital technology, but also confident, critical, and responsible use of digital technology for education, work, and participation in social life. This comprises information and data literacy, communication and cooperation, media literacy, digital content creation (including programming), security (including digital well-being and competences related to cybersecurity and intellectual property, problem-solving, and critical thinking (p. 9).
2. Basic knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to this competence.
 - a) Individuals should understand how digital technology can facilitate communication, creation, and innovation, and also what opportunities, limitations, influences, and risks they carry. They should understand the general principles, mechanisms, and logic of the developing digital technology and know their basic functions as well as use of different devices, software, and networks. Individuals should approach the validity, reliability, and influence of information and data accessible digitally in a critical way and they should also be familiar with the legal and ethical principles related to the use of digital technology (p. 9).
 - b) Individuals should be able to use digital technology to support their active citizenship and social inclusion, cooperation with others, and creative approach to achieving their personal, social, or business goals.
 - c) This requires the ability to access the digital content, use, filter, evaluate, create, program, and share it. Individuals should be able to control and protect information, content, data, and digital identities as well as recognize different software, devices, AI, and robots and use all of these effectively.
 - d) The use of digital technology and digital content requires a reflective and critical, but also curious, open-minded, and prospective approach to its development. Moreover, it requires an ethical, safe, and responsible approach (p. 10).

Media literacy is also referred to in relation to the characteristics of *citizenship competence*, specifically, the development of abilities necessary for critical thinking and integrated problem-

solving, argumentation skills, constructive participation in community activities, but also decision-making at all levels – from local and national to the European and international levels. It also comprises the ability to approach traditional as well as new media critically, learn to use them, and understand the role and functions of media in democratic society (p. 11).

However, secondary references to media literacy can be found in the descriptions of other competences as well:

1. *Competences related to mathematics, science, technology, and engineering* – these competences should allow individuals to understand the benefits, limitations, and risks of scientific theories and applications as well as technology in societies in general (in the context of decision-making, values, moral questions, culture, etc.) (p. 9).
2. *Competences related to cultural awareness and expression* – they include understanding and respect for the fact that ideas and meanings can be expressed creatively and permeate other cultures through art and other cultural forms. It involves active understanding, development, and expression of one’s own opinions as well as the ability to identify one’s own place or role in society in a variety of ways and contexts (p. 11).

4) *Manifesto for Adult Learning in the 21st Century: The Power and Joy of Learning (2019)*

This document emphasizes the benefits of adult education as well as the opportunity to develop transformative skills/abilities offered to individuals who participate in it. This document describes 9 key areas of adult education.

Media literacy is part of the following areas:

1. active citizenship and democracy – adult education is the tool for the development of critical thinking and empowerment, a lively and inspired civil society, knowledge, and know-how. Adult education also provides the space to develop active citizenship. We need adult education to reflect on societal situations and challenges, in order to learn from prevailing European issues such as increasing radicalisation, migration and social inequalities. These issues have shown that democratic attitudes, tolerance and respect need to be reinforced. Critical thinking is also at the heart of understanding a digital world, which demands a prominent level of *media literacy* (p. 5).
2. life skills for individuals – EAEA, together with members and partners, has developed a “framework of life skills”, which demonstrates the need for lifelong and life-wide learning for everyone. Based on new economic, technological and societal developments, we will all have to update our life skills. Adult education transforms lives and provides new opportunities. It opens new job opportunities, provides the pathway to learning, helps early school leavers return to education, activates people’s artistic and cultural passions and leads to health and well-being. These life skills include *digital capabilities*.
3. being familiar with a computer supported and web-based environment and able to use digital tools, media and resources, e.g., to find information, solve practical tasks, create digital content and products, and manage data – having a critical understanding of the nature, techniques and impact of media messages (p. 10).

5) *CONFINTEA VII Marrakech Framework for Action – Harnessing the transformational power of Adult Learning and Education (2022)*

By adopting the Marrakech Framework for Action at the Seventh International Conference on Adult Education on 17 June 2022, representatives of more than 140 countries committed to make the vision of a right to life-long learning real. They committed to significantly increase adult participation in learning and recognised the need for increased investment into adult education. The Marrakech Framework for Action determines the key areas of activities necessary to achieve this goal within the following decade. UNESCO members states will strive to implement the right to life-long learning and enhance adult education management and quality by promoting increased investments.

Media literacy is explicitly referred to in the section titled „Action recommendations for transformative Adult Learning and Education“; Point 39 states: “We further highlight the importance of active and global citizenship, and of media and information literacy, in tackling societal and development challenges. We therefore encourage initiatives to strengthen citizenship education for adults with the aim of developing learners’ capacities to critically evaluate information, make informed decisions, develop agency, and contribute significantly to their local communities and public debate” (p. 10).

4. Discussion and conclusion

In this research study, the authors strived to point out the importance of adult media literacy in the context of citizenship education of adults and draw attention to the fact that the existing strategic documents do not pay enough attention to this issue. In terms of the content analysis of the selected documents, not only explicit, but also secondary and partial references to media literacy were searched for. It can be concluded that despite ongoing research and the declared emphasis on this area, in the legislative and strategic documents, media literacy remains merely a secondary “object of interest”. In this part of the paper, the results of the analysis performed will be summarised and compared to similar research studies.

Two national strategic documents were analysed. *The strategy for life-long learning and counselling for 2021–2030* is a key document for the Slovak education policy for the upcoming decade. Among other topics, it also defines the contents of life-long learning, which is primarily focused on the economic development of society. In the strategy, which defines the life-long learning process, media literacy is only referred to twice. Generalised media literacy is referred to in the segment (“area”) of citizenship education of adults and characterised as “a basic skill and key competence of citizenship education of adults”. Secondary contextual links to media literacy can be found in the calls for the development of critical thinking, combating hybrid threats, or generalised protection and security.

The second strategic document analysed was the *National programme for active ageing*. Although NPAS II does not explicitly refer to media literacy, the content analysis of its provisions identified contextual links in it:

1. the call for active participation of older people in social, civic, political, and economic processes, or elimination of the barriers that complicate or prevent it.
 - a) Only a tenth of older people in Slovakia are interested in political participation of civic engagement, which is below the EU28 average. In the social participation summary domain, Slovakia scored slightly below the EU28 average as well (16.1% vs. 17.9% respectively) (pp. 14–15).
2. promotion of personality development and mental health among older citizens in a broader context of improving their quality of life
3. protection from or elimination of various kinds of risks including manipulation. In this context, media literacy can be related to the development of digital and financial literacy:
 - a) The findings about older people’s digital literacy and their ability to use today’s communication tools and technology in the digital era are important. Their lack of digital literacy may hamper their access to public resources and services, necessary information, and social participation tools – not only in paid jobs, but also in a wide scope of individually and socially beneficial activities (p. 14).

In general, it can be stated that the national legislative and strategic documents analysed only address adult media literacy marginally, mostly in the context of other areas such as life-long learning, citizenship education, or preparation for the old age.

As for international documents, three strategic ones of key importance for adult education were analysed. The first one was the *Council of Europe Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning* – a complex document with cohesive contents and a logical internal organisation.

It determines the framework of life-long learning based on an analysis of the changing conditions and in turn, educational needs in a broad social and economic, cultural, and political context.

The fact that the complementarity of individual competences for life-long learning is repeatedly emphasized can be considered progressive. The meaning, goals, and functions of media literacy is characterised.

Besides explicit references to media literacy as a key component of digital and partially also citizenship competence (i.e., anchored in citizenship education of adults), the following attributes are specified:

1. critical thinking;
2. the ability to perceive phenomena and information within a broader sociocultural context;
3. recognition of the potential, limitations, and risks pertaining to different forms of social communication;
4. emphasis on argumentative interpretation of the received and shared content;
5. responsible decision-making based on verified sources, etc.
6. These attributes are integrated in multiple other key competences (literacy, mathematical, scientific, technological, and engineering competences; business competence, cultural awareness and expression) – see the links above.

The second document was the *Manifesto for Adult Learning in the 21st Century: The Power and Joy of Learning*. This document aims to promote a Learning Europe, which will acquire all necessary skills, knowledge, and competences to deal with the future (EAEA, 2019). This document specifies 9 key areas, which need to be developed through adult education. As explained in the previous part, media literacy has become part of active citizenship development. According to this document, today's European citizens face a variety of challenges including the overload of freely accessible online sources, which carries certain risks. Without proper development in media (digital) literacy, citizens are unable to respond appropriately and participate in public life. Therefore, media literacy is specified as one of the key life skills necessary for every individual.

The third international document is *CONFINTEA VII Marrakech Framework for Action – Harnessing the transformational power of Adult Learning and Education*, a report from an international UNESCO conference, which provides recommendations. Although this document connects media literacy to the literary one and is referred to only once, the importance of the document as such deserves to be pointed out. More than 1,000 participants including presidents, ministers of education, and top-level UN representatives participated at the conference organised by Morocco in Marrakesh from 15 to 17 June 2022. UNESCO called for a new social agreement on education, which is why the participants discussed about the ways to use the transformative power of adult education and education for long-term sustainable development in the context of challenges such as the climate crisis, rapid technological progress, and changing world of labour. The Marrakech Framework for Action determines the key areas of activities necessary to achieve this goal within the following decade. UNESCO members states will strive to implement the right to life-long learning and enhance adult education management and quality by promoting increased investments. Therefore, the Marrakech Framework is of key importance on terms of the ongoing development of media literacy because it is directly related to the challenges addressed at the conference.

To conclude, despite the declared importance of the development of media literacy, neither national nor international documents deal with this area in detail. On the other hand, it should be emphasized that experts and relevant organisations are working hard to address this issue in research, for example, the *Media Literacy Index* published by the Open Society Institute Sofia (last updated in 2023). This document annually summarises the results of research into the development of media literacy in 41 European countries. In 2023, this index was expanded to cover 47 countries (Australia, Canada, Japan, Israel, South Korea, and the US were included). Individual countries are ranked based on their scores in the 4 basic indicators – media freedom,

education, trust, and new forms of participation. This kind of information is immensely helpful in the formulation and creation of educational programmes for different target groups with the aim to facilitate society-wide progress.

As for the limitations of this overview study, it was purely theoretical. Due to the methodology used, practical recommendations would not be supported properly. However, it can be stated that the area of media literacy obviously requires proper attention at both national and international levels. Today's society is widely affected by the rapid technological development (for example, the progress of artificial intelligence and its potential for misuse). Society needs individuals equipped with proper media literacy to respond to the changing world, where it is necessary to differentiate true and false information. This study can provide a basis for further empirical research into this area (e.g., the level of media literacy development).

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