

Integrating Media and Information Literacy in English Academic classes to empower students for the digital age

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Abstract: *This article explores the imperative need for the integration of Media and Information Literacy (MIL) into the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classes. In a digital-dominated era, students gearing up for academic discourse must not only possess language proficiency but also the skills required to navigate and critically engage with an array of media sources. This article contends that integrating MIL in the EAP curriculum is pivotal with substantial benefits. It also provides practical strategies that educators can apply into their pedagogical approaches to integrate MIL and empower students with the skills necessary for the 21st century.*

Keywords: *media and information literacy, integrating, English for Academic Purposes classes, empower students.*

Introduction

Nowadays, technological advancements are enhancing the ease of accessing information, a fundamental necessity in everyday life for society. Information is generally packaged into various types of media, such as printed media, newspapers, magazines, books, electronic media, radio, television, and digital media. With information widely disseminated across media platforms, the role of journalism as an educator has never been more critical. According to the New York Times, “media plays a vital role when it comes to informing the public on what’s happening around the world, which is as well helpful to students who need to be updated on the current issues surrounding them... One of the channels to achieve this, educationists say is to use newspapers as a teaching aid, especially as a tool to promote the reading culture where a lot of efforts have been invested by the government and other stakeholders.”

The rapid advancement of information technology and communication has brought about significant changes in the way knowledge is gathered, produced, and shared. Gen Z are growing up online and are more accustomed to receiving news from various media sources. They face a news environment

significantly different from that of their parents—or even older siblings—were used to seeing. Traditional news sources such as newspapers and magazines have lost readership and now are increasingly focused on attracting online audiences via websites or user-generated video channels. There are more and more ways to find information. However, there is more uncertainty than ever about whether readers can access to reliable information or not. The internet and social networks have undeniably brought a myriad of benefits but also present challenges. Fake news and misinformation proliferate on social media, making young people get lost in an ocean of information. What the audience perceives from media messages might diverge from the intended meaning with the same content being interpreted differently due to varying social contexts. Accordingly, the significance of using media consciously and accurately amidst its various positive and negative aspects is on the rise. In fact, not only students, people of all ages in the society must possess the adequate knowledge and skills to use tools for accessing and evaluating media. It is becoming increasingly crucial to be a mindful consumer and creator of media, fostering skills in media and information literacy to grasp the actuality behind what is presented.

In academic settings, students are now expected to not only have a strong command of the English language but also possess the skills to navigate the increasingly intricate digital landscape. In a world where information bombards us from every direction in an ever-changing digital environment, the importance of understanding Media and Information Literacy (MIL) cannot be overstated. MIL empowers individuals to critically evaluate information, navigate the complexities of the digital realm, and responsibly engage as informed citizens. Integrating MIL into English classes is a vital step in equipping students with the necessary skills and knowledge to thrive in the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century. In the future, education solely focused on transmitting knowledge is no longer suitable. Instead, methods concentrating on critical thinking and skills—attributes that machines cannot replace—are increasingly emphasized. Hence, media education is now required in many curricula all over the world to provide students with fundamental skills in the digital age. Institutions are doing their best to help teachers prepare students for changes and have continued access to the right tools for students to work with media.

Understanding Media and Information Literacy (MIL)

MIL is an umbrella term that encompasses various and evolving competencies [or skills] required to navigate today's increasingly complex

communications environment. MIL empowers citizens with critical thinking and other necessary competencies to enable their informed and ethical engagement with the integration of content, institutions providing content (and providing opportunities to produce and share own content), and digital technologies” (UNESCO, 2021, p. 6)

Media Literacy is a 21st century approach to education. It provides a framework to access, analyze, evaluate, create and participate with messages in a variety of forms — from print to video to the Internet. Media literacy builds an understanding of the role of media in society as well as essential skills of inquiry and self-expression necessary for citizens of a democracy. (Center for media literacy, 2011)

Information literacy is a set of abilities requiring individuals to “recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information.” (American Library Association, 1989).

In terms of MIL theories, there are three most widely-acknowledged ones namely Gatekeeping, Framing, and Agenda Setting. They provide us with insights into how media and information impact our perception of the world and shape our decision-making processes. Essentially, media is not impartial, highlighting the need for MIL skills to recognize biases favoring certain authorities, prompting us to seek additional information sources and critically evaluate the information presented.

A significant MIL theory, Shoemaker and Vos’s (2009) Gatekeeping Theory, explains how media controls the flow of information to the public. The media—newspapers, television, and social platforms—acts as an authority, determining what details about the project are accessible to readers.

Tewksbury and Scheufele’s (2011) Framing Theory highlights how media shapes information using “frames” to influence perceptions. Similar to how artists frame paintings to influence interpretation, media creators choose visuals and language to impact how you perceive the information. In the case of the apartment building, media strategically uses imagery and wording to shape your perception of the project.

Lastly, McCombs and Shaw’s (2014) Agenda Setting Theory outlines how media coverage dictates public attention to issues. Put simply, the more media coverage a topic receives, the more authority and importance it gains. In the context of the building project, heightened media coverage correlates with increased public interest and concern.

These theories provide insights into how authority governs our information access and underscore the importance of developing MIL skills.

These skills empower us to challenge authority when necessary, seek accurate information, and effectively utilize it to form and substantiate our viewpoints.

The UNESCO MIL Curriculum and Competency Framework resource combines three distinct areas – media literacy, information literacy, digital literacy – under one umbrella term: media and information literacy (as shown in Figure 1).

Information Literacy						
Define and articulate information needs	Locate and access information	Assess information	Organize information	Make ethical use of information	Communicate information	Use ICT skills for information processing
Media Literacy						
Understand the role and functions of media, and internet communications companies in democratic societies	Understand the conditions under which media can fulfill their functions	Critically evaluate media content in the light of media functions		Engage with media for self-expression and democratic participation	Review skills (including ICTs needed to produce user-generated content	
Digital Literacy						
Use of digital tools	Understand digital identity	Recognize digital rights	Assess AI issues	Improve how to communicate digitally	Manage digital health	Practice digital security and safety

Figure 1. Key outcomes/elements of media and information literacy

Traditional information literacy focuses on accessing information, evaluating its quality, and using it ethically. However, traditional media literacy also prioritizes information access and freedom of expression. It emphasizes understanding how media and digital communication entities function, evaluating their content, critically interacting with them. Digital literacy spans across both traditional information and media literacy, emphasizing technical abilities alongside softer skills specific to digital concerns. With the rise of digital communication platforms, digital literacy involves utilizing digital tools for creating written content, images, videos, and designs. As these elements increasingly serve as means for sharing information and educating individuals, particularly young people, about ethical content creation and distribution, MIL competencies and digital skills become indispensable.

From Figure 1, it can be seen that MIL includes a multifaceted skill set that enables individuals to access, evaluate, create, and communicate information in various forms. The core components involve critical thinking, understanding media messages, identifying biases, responsibly creating and sharing content. In an English academic setting, these skills are important in fostering students’ abilities to comprehend diverse texts, engage critically

with information, and communicate effectively through written and oral expression.

Therefore, the theoretical foundation for the integration of MIL into the EAP classroom is grounded in well-established concepts from media literacy, information literacy, and language education.

Benefits of integrating MIL into EAP

The integration of Media and Information Literacy into English academic classrooms offers multifaceted benefits. Linda Ellerbee, host of *Nick News* (1992-2015), said, “Media literacy is not just important, it’s absolutely critical. It’s going to make the difference between whether kids are a tool of the mass media or whether the mass media is a tool for kids to use.”

Firstly, it equips students with critical thinking skills which are fundamental to help them become independent life-long learners. Students develop the ability to analyze information objectively, identify biases, and evaluate sources for credibility, empowering them to make informed decisions, both in their academic pursuits and in their personal lives.

MIL also promotes effective communication and collaboration skills. Students learn to express their ideas clearly and persuasively, both in written and oral forms. It enhances communication skills by enabling students to effectively express themselves through diverse media forms, thereby catering to different audiences. With MIL, students have opportunities to work together to create, critically evaluate, and share media contents. These skills are essential for success in any academic or professional field.

MIL can also help your students develop themselves into active consumers of information, assisting them to find out credible information sources, fostering responsible digital citizenship. MIL enables learners to determine credible sources, acknowledge biases in media, and be responsible creators of media. Therefore, it also cultivates other 21st-century skills like creativity, collaboration, and communication, as well as increasing digital literacy skills through interacting with media, information, and technology.

Research skills are fundamental in academic contexts, especially for higher education when the ability to locate, evaluate, and use information effectively is essential. MIL facilitates effective information gathering, evaluation, and synthesis, empowering students to engage in academic research and contribute meaningfully to the scholarly context.

Luckily, English, being a universal means of communication, opens doors to numerous media and information outlets worldwide. Within English academic environments, there is an excellent opportunity to incorporate

MIL, nurturing individuals who can carefully evaluate information, adeptly create media, and responsibly navigate the digital realm.

How to integrate MIL into EAP classes?

Successfully integrating Media and Information Literacy (MIL) into English classrooms involves a comprehensive approach from various aspects. Firstly, we should smoothly blend MIL concepts into existing English language lessons via such activities as analyzing news articles, evaluating social media content, making digital presentations etc. Secondly, MIL must bring into class the authentic learning experiences which allow students to apply MIL skills to real-life situations e.g analyzing/giving opinion about current events, or creating their own digital media. Thirdly, collaboration among students in EAP classes when using MIL needs to foster peer learning, where learners can jointly explore media content or conduct projects on MIL-related themes. Fourthly, integrating MIL means using technology to bring in tools like online platforms, interactive simulations, and digital storytelling etc.

MIL is not just about teaching students how to use technology; it is about teaching them how to think critically and to be responsible digital citizens. As mentioned in the previous part, integrating MIL into EAP classes is not a luxury but a necessity to prepare our students for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.

While integrating MIL into English classrooms is advantageous, challenges may arise, mainly because educators themselves need to become proficient in MIL. They should prioritize their role as advocates for MIL and have to adapt to new educational roles while balancing traditional teaching methods with more learner-centered approaches. Educators are more inclined to integrate MIL into the curriculum when it aligns with teaching strategies that link social learning outside of formal learning spaces to learning informal spaces, thus improving how people learn (UNESCO 2021, p.18).

Integrating MIL into English academic classes requires varied techniques in order to develop critical thinking, refine communication abilities, and promote responsible information use.

One valuable method is organizing specialized workshops aimed at enhancing students' MIL skills. These workshops serve as platforms where students learn to use tools to critically assess different media forms, encompassing articles, videos, and podcasts. Through comprehensive discussions on such topics as bias identification, source assessment, fact-checking methods, and understanding diverse media formats, students develop the capability of identifying and assessing information. The

workshops also foster an environment where critical thinking can be practiced, empowering students to view the landscape of media with a more analytical mindset, equipping them to engage more effectively as consumers in terms of media and information dissemination.

Another effective strategy involves the facilitation of engaging classroom debates or discussions centered on media-related themes. The cozy atmosphere of the classroom is likely to motivate students to voice their opinions. This approach further enhances MIL skills by linking them with real-life scenarios and contemporary events. Possible topics include analyzing media's societal impacts, examining portrayals of certain groups in media, or exploring language's role in shaping public opinion.

Integrating media-centered exercises within the educational curriculum represents a pivotal strategy in bolstering students' media analytical capacity. Teachers should assign tasks where students analyze articles, advertisements, films, or similar contents by exploring the themes, cultural expressions, and linguistic elements presented in these forms of media. Furthermore, assigning essays that require students to synthesize their understanding from the primary text and interpret it by using media sources will promote crucial evaluation skills, utilizing evidence from both the original source and media outlets.

Involving students in collaborative projects that encourage creative media production proves to be a powerful and impactful method. Such tasks as making podcasts, making video, or digital storytelling centered around literary themes or characters not only highlights the significance of ethically producing content but also underscores its substantial impact on shaping how audiences perceive information. By engaging in these projects, students not only sharpen their technical skills but also gain a deeper understanding of the ethical dimensions involved in content creation and its potential influence on viewers.

Moreover, the curriculum should stress the importance of source evaluation in developing students' ability to identify credible sources. Encouraging the use of diverse sources while teaching them to assess credibility, relevance, and bias in each source improves their critical thinking skills, vital for navigating today's information landscape. Encouraging students to delve into various sources not only broadens their understanding but also equips them with the tools to differentiate between trustworthy and misleading information.

Another technique is to create opportunities for students to compare and contrast the expression of a literary piece across diverse media formats.

This approach enables students to delve deeper into the differences in narrative presentation across mediums, fostering a comprehensive grasp of how storytelling is adapted and conveyed. By exploring how a literary work transforms when presented in different media forms, students gain insights into the distinctive methods utilized to convey messages, emotions, and themes through visuals, text, or audio-visual representations. This comparative analysis not only broadens their perspective but also encourages critical thinking by prompting them to analyze the effectiveness of storytelling techniques in different contexts. Ultimately, this exercise empowers students to appreciate the versatility of storytelling across media, enhancing their ability to interpret and appreciate diverse narrative forms.

Finally, engaging students in interactive learning activities, such as media-based puzzles or simulations, is a great way to get them involved with media messages. It encourages them to dig into the information, understand it better, and use what they have learned to make smart choices. These activities are not just fun—they are hands-on experiences that help build critical thinking skills and teach responsible ways to handle media content. By diving into these puzzles or simulations, students get a feel for how media works, and they become more skilled at figuring out what is being said and why.

While the idea of incorporating MIL into the classroom in general and EAP classes in particular is not a new idea, there is no agreement among scholars and practitioners on the best methods to do it. Moreover, existing approaches to MIL tend to focus on developing students' critical thinking, assessment, and production skills. Detailed instructional guidance for teachers on how to integrate these methods is still lacking. This absence of teaching methodology might leave educators unsure about how media literacy fits into their specific subjects. Although studies propose that teachers can integrate MIL by linking it to their curriculum, teaching techniques for assessing online information credibility, and creating subject-specific resources, a deeper exploration of how MIL concepts relate to specific subject contexts is necessary.

Conclusion

In a world increasingly shaped by digital media and information, MIL has emerged as an indispensable skill set for success in the 21st century. By integrating MIL into English academic classrooms, educators empower students to become critical consumers of information, skilled producers of media, and responsible digital citizens. This comprehensive approach to English language learning prepares students for lifelong success in an interconnected, information-driven world.

In order to integrate MIL successfully, educators should stay abreast of current trends, ensuring the chosen media aligns with the learning objectives and themes of the literature being taught. The European Parliament emphasized the need for teacher training on media literacy as well as the integration of MIL in the curriculum to enhance students' capacity of self-protection and promote responsible attitudes among all users. These professional training should focus on the essential skills, strategies, attitudes, and teaching methods related to media literacy. Additionally, research has indicated that developing curriculum materials can be an effective approach to professional development in media literacy. As far as students are concerned, they themselves need to be provided with foundational knowledge with key concepts such as media literacy, narrative techniques, visual storytelling, and the impact of adaptations on the interpretation of literary texts./.

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