

Media education and the challenges of the digital environment: towards enabling children to safely use social networking sites

التربية الإعلامية وتحديات البيئة الرقمية: نحو تمكين الأطفال من الاستخدام الآمن لمواقع التواصل الاجتماعي

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الملخص:

تهدف هذه الورقة البحثية الى إبراز دور التربية الإعلامية بوصفها أداة ضرورية لتعزيز سلامة البناء القيمي والأخلاقي لدى الناشئة (الأطفال) في المجتمعات العربية لاسيما في ظل الاستخدام المتزايد لمنصات التواصل الاجتماعي، من خلال تعلّم الأطفال كيفية استخدام وسائل الإعلام والتواصل الاجتماعي بطريقة آمنة، مسؤولة، وأخلاقية ليكونوا "مواطنين رقميين" نشطين ومساهمين بوعي في بيئتهم الرقمية. تم اعتماد المنهج الوصفي التحليلي، من خلال مراجعة الأدبيات الأكاديمية والدراسات الميدانية ذات الصلة لاستقراء التأثيرات السلبية لاستخدام مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي من قبل الأطفال وكيف يمكن الحد منها في البيئة الرقمية. وخلصت الدراسة إلى ضرورة تضافر جهود المعنيين بمجالات التربية والإعلام والمؤسسات الاجتماعية، بالإضافة إلى إدماج مفهوم التربية الإعلامية وتطبيقاتها ضمن مناهج المؤسسات التعليمية المختلفة، بما يعزز تحقيق أهداف التنمية الفكرية والقيمية في المجتمعات العربية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التربية الإعلامية، مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي، الأطفال، البيئة الرقمية.

Abstract:

This research paper seeks to underscore the pivotal role of media education as an essential tool for reinforcing the moral and value-based foundations of young people, particularly children, in Arab societies. This need has become increasingly urgent in light of the growing prevalence of social media platforms. The study advocates for equipping children with the knowledge, skills, and ethical frameworks necessary to engage with media and digital communication in a safe, responsible, and conscientious manner, thereby enabling them to become active "digital citizens" and thoughtful contributors to their digital environments.

A descriptive analytical methodology was employed, involving a comprehensive review of academic literature and relevant empirical studies to examine the negative effects

associated with children's use of social networking sites and to explore strategies for mitigating these risks within digital environments. The findings emphasize the necessity of collective action by stakeholders in the fields of education, media, and social institutions. Furthermore, the study calls for the systematic integration of media education concepts and practices into the curricula of educational institutions at all levels, as a means of promoting intellectual, ethical, and cultural development within Arab societies.

Keywords: media literacy, social networking sites, children, digital environment.

Introduction:

In the contemporary era, the world is experiencing rapid advancements in information and communication technologies, resulting in the emergence of a variety of digital media applications that signify a profound transformation in the production and distribution of media content. These applications, which are primarily internet-based, are characterized by their capacity to directly engage with audiences, thereby enabling users to play an active role in both the dissemination and creation of content.

Among the most significant of these applications is social media, which has become an unparalleled media and cultural phenomenon in the modern age. These platforms have effectively attracted a wide-ranging audience, spanning various age groups and nationalities, and have evolved into vital spaces for communication and the exchange of knowledge. Social media sites have also played a pivotal role in redefining the nature of media by providing individuals with the means to produce and distribute content instantaneously and directly.

The widespread availability and use of social media platforms have made them a central focus in the study of the effects of digital media on individuals and societies. These platforms have become an integral part of daily life, raising important questions regarding the management of the vast flow of information and its impact on users' behaviors and cultural perceptions.

Within this context, the concept of "media literacy" or "digital media literacy" emerges as a crucial tool for guiding individuals toward the conscious and responsible use of modern media. This form of education not only enhances users' understanding of media tools but also fosters the development of critical thinking and analytical skills, enabling individuals to assess and evaluate information in an objective manner.

Ultimately, media literacy is a key component in empowering children and adolescents to develop the necessary skills for engaging positively with digital content. This enables them to make informed decisions regarding the information they encounter, thereby reducing the adverse effects of excessive digital consumption and fostering the creation of an informed, digitally responsible society capable of interacting with the world in a constructive and positive manner.

2The Problem:

Despite the significant potential offered by social media platforms, children and adolescents remain among the most vulnerable groups in relation to digital media content. This vulnerability arises from their frequent lack of the necessary skills for critical analysis and objective evaluation of the information circulating through these platforms, leaving them susceptible to misleading or age-inappropriate content.

Moreover, this unregulated exposure to digital media has several psychological, social, and moral repercussions, potentially impacting the psychological and educational well-being of young people. It may also contribute to the development of behaviors that are inconsistent with social and cultural norms, thereby exacerbating the challenges faced by families and educational institutions in managing this engagement.

In light of these challenges, this research paper seeks to address a central question: How can media literacy contribute to empowering children to engage with social media in a positive and safe manner? This primary question is further explored through a set of sub-questions related to potential educational strategies and the role of educational and media institutions in implementing this approach within the contemporary digital environment.

A. Sub-questions:

The study's central inquiry is supported by several sub-questions aimed at examining different facets of the phenomenon under investigation. These are as follows:

- What are the core concepts and principles of media literacy that can be utilized to protect children and enhance their digital awareness?
- What are the most significant digital threats and influences that children encounter while using social media?
- How does media literacy contribute to modifying children's digital behavior and promoting their safe and responsible use of social media platforms?

B. Study Objectives:

This study aims to achieve several academic objectives that fall within the theoretical and applied domains of media literacy, as outlined below:

- To clarify the fundamental concepts of media literacy and explain its theoretical and practical dimensions.
- To analyze the primary challenges and negative consequences associated with children's use of social media in the contemporary digital context.
- To evaluate the role that media literacy plays in modifying children's digital behavior and enhancing their awareness of the safe and responsible use of interactive media.
- To review and analyze successful international models and best practices in the field of media literacy for children.
- To offer practical, actionable recommendations that can contribute to promoting the positive and informed use of social media among children.

C. Importance of the Study:

This study is of significant scientific and practical importance, especially given the

profound transformations occurring in the global communications landscape and the increasing involvement of emerging groups, particularly children, in the digital realm without the requisite protective measures and empowerment tools. The importance of the study is underscored by the following points:

- The study is crucial due to the pressing need to understand the repercussions of children's extensive use of social media platforms, considering the major shifts imposed by the digital environment and the resultant challenges, such as exposure to unsafe content, abnormal digital behaviors, and potential psychological and social impacts.
- The study holds value for providing an analytical and conceptual framework that can be utilized by educational and media institutions, as well as families, to develop programs and initiatives that enhance media literacy and foster the conscious and responsible use of digital technologies among children.
- The research aims to present a contemporary scientific approach that links media literacy with the concept of digital empowerment, facilitating the development of effective strategies to address the challenges posed by the extensive use of social media by young people.

3. Study Methodology:

A. Methodology:

This study seeks to explore the topic of media literacy within the context of the challenges posed by the contemporary digital environment, with a particular emphasis on strategies for empowering children to engage with social media in a safe and conscious manner. To achieve this objective, a descriptive-analytical methodology was employed. This approach involves the collection and analysis of relevant scientific literature to elucidate key concepts and identify the interactions between media literacy and the ongoing digital transformations. Such an approach facilitates the development of a comprehensive theoretical framework grounded in the scientific findings and data derived from prior studies.

B. Timeframe:

The timeframe for the selection of scientific literature and sources for this study spans from 2015 to 2024. This period was chosen to ensure the study remains current and aligned with the rapid developments occurring in the digital landscape. Emphasis was placed on peer-reviewed studies and reports published by reputable educational and media organizations, owing to their credibility and analytical depth. To gather the relevant literature, a variety of international and national academic databases were utilized.

4-Conceptual foundations of media education.

4.1- Understanding "Education" and "Media"

Before delving into the concept of media education, it is essential to separately examine the notions of "education" and "media" to establish a robust theoretical framework for both.

A- Education: The term "education" is interpreted variably, shaped by the philosophical principles adopted by societies to guide the upbringing of generations and to instill values and beliefs. These interpretations also differ based on perspectives about the nature, methods, and objectives of the educational process.

According to Al-Shammari (2010, p. 18), education is defined as:

"Every organized activity that aims to refine human behavior, provide individuals with values and knowledge, and develop their cognitive skills, enabling them to adapt to their environment and engage in self-directed learning."

The Dictionary of the Language of Educators provides a similar definition, describing education as:

"Every organized activity that aims to refine human behavior, provide values and knowledge, and develop thinking skills, thereby enabling adaptation to one's environment and fostering self-learning."

Ali Abdel Fattah Ali (2014, p. 20) offers another perspective, defining education as:

"The process of shaping and preparing individuals within a specific society, time, and place, equipping them with skills, values, attitudes, and behavioral patterns that enable them to interact effectively with their social and material environment."

This definition emphasizes the human dimension of education, highlighting its adaptability to the unique pillars and circumstances of each society. It underscores how education evolves over time and across contexts, enabling individuals to communicate and thrive within their surroundings.

B- Media: Kamel Khorshid Murad (2014, p. 558) defines media as:

"A process that begins with a journalist's identification of significant, publication-worthy information, followed by stages involving the collection of information from various sources, such as newspapers, news agencies, radio stations, or television networks."

This conceptualization illustrates the procedural and systematic nature of media, emphasizing its role in gathering and disseminating information through diverse channels.

C- Definition of Media Education

The concept of media education has undergone significant development in both Arab and Western academic discourse, driven by the transformative impact of the media and information revolution, which has emerged as a defining feature of the twenty-first century. Diverse interpretations and approaches have illuminated multiple dimensions of this concept.

The "Dictionary of Educational Terms defines media education as:

"Providing the student with a degree of educational knowledge and concepts related to dealing with the media and how to benefit from the knowledge available to him" (Al-Laqqai &

Al-Jamal, 2000, p. 75).

This definition emphasizes the core objective of media education: equipping individuals with essential skills to interact effectively with media. These skills include accessing, analyzing, critiquing, and evaluating media content, as well as the ability to create purposeful and informed media outputs.

The Grunwald Declaration (1982) underscores the development of critical awareness regarding communication and media phenomena. It defines media literacy as:

“Teaching the knowledge, skills, and behaviors that support the growth of critical awareness and enhance the competence of media users” (Hussein, 2015, p. 18).

This perspective highlights the role of media literacy in fostering critical thinking, enabling individuals to engage thoughtfully with diverse media messages.

Similarly, the National Conference on Media Literacy (USA, 1992) conceptualizes media literacy as:

“Developing the ability of individuals to access, analyze, evaluate, and produce media messages for multiple purposes across different media outlets” (Silverblatt, 2001, p. 09).

This definition broadens the scope of media literacy, addressing a holistic engagement with media, from reception to production.

Potter (2013) offers another perspective, describing media literacy as:

“The perspective through which individuals expose themselves to media to interpret the messages they receive, with the aim of constructing knowledge using tools and raw materials. Skills are the tools, while information is the raw material.”

This definition accentuates the cognitive dimensions of media literacy, portraying it as a process of informed interaction that relies on the synthesis of skills and information.

Mohamed Abdel Hamid (2012, p. 118) adds a social dimension, defining media literacy as:

“The planned efforts made by formal and informal educational and learning institutions to enable individuals to engage consciously with media and its products, and to exercise their communication rights by developing the knowledge and skills necessary to choose the media, critically analyze messages, and creatively participate in the production of symbols and meanings.”

This perspective emphasizes media literacy's role in fostering active citizenship, contributing to societal stability and progress by promoting ethical, cultural, and democratic values.

From these varied definitions, it is evident that media education transcends the mere transmission of knowledge. It constitutes an integrated process aimed at equipping individuals

to engage critically and constructively with media, enhancing social awareness, and contributing to the development of a stable, informed, and progressive society.

4.2- The Importance of Media Education

Media education has become increasingly significant in the era of the information and communication technology revolution, which has transformed media into a primary means of transmitting culture and shaping societal awareness. It serves as a critical defense for Arab and Islamic identity against growing Western cultural influences, while simultaneously reinforcing cultural and social values. As influential cultural instruments, media facilitate the dissemination of behavioral patterns, foster social integration, and support or modify societal positions. Additionally, media play a vital role in executing cultural policies by delivering cultural knowledge and moral expression to millions of individuals (Abu Arja, 2003, pp. 113–114).

The overarching goal of media education is to equip individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary to comprehend the media's role in shaping perceptions and worldviews. Furthermore, it prepares them to actively participate in their virtual communities while respecting societal ethics and maintaining adherence to the principles of freedom of expression. Media education also focuses on cultivating individuals' ability to analyze and discuss media messages in light of personal and cultural factors, thereby emphasizing the diversity of media interactions and their varied effects depending on individual experiences and backgrounds (Suleiman, 2013, p. 71).

Media education fosters **media awareness**, a foundational mechanism for critical engagement with media content. It empowers individuals to overcome blind trust in media information and enhances their capacity to navigate rapidly evolving technological landscapes. Moreover, media education serves as a powerful tool for promoting a culture of dialogue and enabling individuals to contribute positively to societal development (Al-Shammari, 2010, p. 25).

In the absence of media education, misinformation proliferates, leading to distorted awareness, concealed truths, and impaired decision-making abilities. The lack of media literacy also contributes to the erosion of moral values, adversely affecting societal stability and cohesion. This makes the need for media education particularly critical in the context of the transformations introduced by new media. With individuals now capable of producing media content that reflects their cultural identities, media literacy becomes essential to ensuring these capabilities are exercised ethically and in alignment with societal values (Al-Khairi, 1430 AH, p. 126).

In the digital age, media literacy skills have taken on unprecedented importance. Fundamental skills such as reading and writing are now prerequisites for participating in online discussions, blogs, wikis, and electronic forums, which demand heightened precision and information literacy. Media literacy underscores the necessity of critical reading, which involves consciously analyzing and evaluating media content and scrutinizing the techniques employed to convey meanings.

Furthermore, media literacy equips individuals to uncover how media representations shape social reality. Media content often conveys multiple interpretations that may diverge from actual reality. Consequently, media literacy becomes an indispensable tool for identifying these disparities and enhancing individuals' capacity to engage with media content critically and with analytical depth.

5- Social media and its impact on children.

5.1- Social media and child

The proliferation of new communication media, particularly social media, has profoundly influenced children, adolescents, and young people. The extensive use of these platforms has become a visible phenomenon, altering traditional social interaction patterns and affecting the values and behaviors of younger generations.

The Internet has increasingly become a substitute for healthy, face-to-face social interaction. Many individuals, especially children, spend prolonged periods exploring online platforms instead of engaging with friends and family. This shift disrupts traditional social values, including teamwork and cooperation, which are vital components of many cultural systems. Consequently, children are adapting to a virtual environment filled with unfamiliar variables, fostering new behaviors that differ significantly from those shaped by traditional social norms. (brada,2024, P.22)

The open and unrestricted nature of the Internet exposes children to a wide spectrum of content—both beneficial and harmful. This lack of supervision fosters a state of alienation and isolation, blurring the lines between the real world and the digital realities portrayed by technology. Social media platforms, satellite channels, and other digital tools often target vulnerable groups, including children and adolescents, who may lack the maturity to critically evaluate the content they encounter.

Children's personalities are particularly fragile during their formative years, making them susceptible to external influences. Unregulated exposure to media and communication technology can lead to psychological, social, and educational challenges. The rapid evolution of these technologies has created an environment that is difficult to monitor, allowing problematic behaviors to develop unnoticed.

Media consumption has led to significant shifts in children's cultural understanding and behaviors. Curiosity and a desire for exploration, natural traits in children, are heightened by the accessibility of online platforms. However, these traits can also lead children away from societal moral standards rooted in religion and tradition. For instance, exposure to extreme or inappropriate content, such as violence or intellectual extremism, can influence children to imitate harmful behaviors. This creates a disconnect from family and societal norms, immersing children in a virtual social fabric that satisfies their curiosity without boundaries or oversight (Belgoul, 2019/2022, p. 28).

The vast freedom offered by the Internet has created a fertile ground for privacy violations and behavioral changes. Many websites and programs broadcast content that deviates from moderate values and religious teachings. These platforms indirectly or directly influence children, promoting ideas and behaviors that are inconsistent with societal norms.

The most significant negative effects of social networking sites on children include:

- **Psychological Impact:** Increased feelings of isolation, anxiety, and depression due to excessive screen time and reduced face-to-face interactions.
- **Behavioral Deviations:** Adoption of inappropriate behaviors influenced by exposure to harmful content.
- **Erosion of Values:** Weakening of moral and cultural standards through engagement with content that contradicts societal norms.
- **Educational Challenges:** Decline in academic performance due to distractions caused by social media use.
- **Privacy Concerns:** Exposure to online risks such as cyberbullying, identity theft, and exploitation.

As researchers observe, the challenges posed by social media require robust strategies to mitigate its negative effects on children. Addressing these issues involves fostering media literacy, promoting parental supervision, and encouraging balanced media consumption that aligns with societal values and developmental needs.

5.2- Disadvantages of the Social media

Many researchers believe that one of the most significant drawbacks of social networking sites is their potential to become tools for spreading destructive ideas, sowing discord, and fostering division within societies. This can occur through individuals acting on their own accord or being influenced by external intelligence agencies. Social media often becomes fertile ground for rumors, misinformation, and the propagation of illusory awareness. Additionally, social networks allow governments, whose messages are often rejected in traditional media, to reintroduce their policies indirectly through these platforms (Fatlouni, 2014, p100).

The negative impacts of social networking sites on adolescents' thoughts, psychology, and behaviors are particularly concerning. These include the following:

- **Psychological Health:** According to American researcher Lay Rosen, frequent use of social networking sites negatively impacts the mental health of children, youth, and adolescents. It increases their susceptibility to stress, depression, narcissism, and other psychological disorders, potentially causing long-term problems.
- **Nervous Strain:** Excessive use of platforms like Facebook and Twitter induces severe stress across all age groups. A study published on the Cambridge University website revealed that modern communication technologies create nervous pressure, not just among the elderly but also adolescents, who are often perceived as more adept at handling technology (Burney, 2018, p. 320).

- **Addiction and Anxiety:** Children often experience extreme anxiety and tension when disconnected from the Internet, which can escalate to depression during prolonged absences from social media. Addiction to these platforms can lead to narcissistic behaviors, including arrogance, a sense of superiority, and personality disorders. A study examining Facebook users highlighted these traits among individuals who spent extended hours on the platform (Yasser, 2014, p. 411).
- **Social Comparison:** A 2017 study by the Royal Society for Public Health found that social media harms self-esteem. Platforms like Instagram and Snapchat create misleading and idealized portrayals of others' lives, leading to feelings of loneliness and self-doubt. Teenagers often question their appearance and private lives due to social comparison, wherein others' lives appear more attractive and fulfilling (Marrakchi, 2020-2021).
- **Exploitation for Malicious Purposes:** social media is often exploited by malicious entities to destabilize societal peace and security. Children and teenagers, lacking critical thinking skills, may unknowingly share information, images, or videos that serve the agendas of harmful groups. A report in Loma Gazette and Braille highlighted Facebook as a Zionist intelligence tool used to recruit agents and spies (Ali, 2014, p. 72).
- **Exposure to Inappropriate Content:** Social media platforms often host pornographic or morally corrupting content that contradicts societal values and principles. Such materials can lure users into behaviors that undermine moral and religious standards, eroding the ethical fabric of society.
- **Cultural and Religious Impact:** Social networking sites facilitate open communication with large and diverse groups of people worldwide, leading to the spread of various ideas and cultures, including those promoting intellectual extremism. This has serious implications for the faith of Muslim societies, especially since many children lack adequate knowledge about their cultural identity and have limited understanding of Islamic teachings. Furthermore, there is a lack of awareness about how Muslims should engage with social media content that contradicts their Islamic identity. This environment also fosters the spread of false and distorted religious teachings and hadiths, potentially misleading individuals, particularly young people who operate websites, pages, and blogs without family supervision (Al-Haddadi, 2016, pp. 95-99).
- **Impact on Education:** Research indicates that excessive use of social media negatively affects individuals in the educational phase, especially students aged 12-17 years. This overuse leads to addiction and social isolation as it diverts attention from educational activities. The allure of entertaining content on social media platforms, which often presents a distorted view of the benefits of their usage, exacerbates this issue (Onis and Qarad, 2021, p. 172).
- **Promotion of Violence:** The widespread sharing of violent videos on social media platforms contributes to desensitizing individuals, especially young people, to violence. In the long term, this promotes the acceptance of violence as a means of

resolving conflicts. A report by The Telegraph in 2015 highlighted the growing number of crimes linked to social networking sites, particularly Facebook. The report noted over 12,300 crimes in the UK in 2011, including murder, rape, child sexual abuse, and assault, with victims often interacting with perpetrators through Facebook. These crimes pose significant challenges to security agencies and heighten societal fears about safety (Onis and Qarad, 2021, p. 172).

- **Entertainment and Idleness:** In many Arab countries, social media usage is primarily seen as a tool for entertainment and amusement, rather than for research, education, or raising awareness. This misuse often stems from boredom and a lack of social engagement. Young people, particularly those with limited life goals, turn to social media as a cheap and accessible source of entertainment, which further exacerbates the negative effects of social media (Guest, 2017).
- **Privacy Violations and Psychological Harm:** The growing use of social media, especially among young people, has led to the emergence of new crimes that invade individuals' privacy. Many adolescents, in particular, publicly share personal information, photos, and videos, making them vulnerable to psychological and moral harm. An example of this is the case of "Basant," an 18-year-old girl from Egypt, whose privacy was violated, leading to her tragic suicide (Mohamed, 2022, p. 7).
- **Social Isolation and Decreased Social Skills:** Researchers argue that social networking sites, particularly Facebook, contribute to the loss of interpersonal skills among adolescents. The overuse of these platforms hampers a child's ability to interact with and adapt to their social environment, leading to poor social compatibility. Adolescence is a crucial stage of life, where psychological and social adaptability is needed to cope with personal, familial, and societal changes. The absence of effective mechanisms to counter the moral and intellectual destruction facilitated by social media often results in negative psychological effects. Therefore, it is crucial to develop strategies to educate and protect youth, redirecting their use of social media from defense to active resistance against harmful ideas and incitement (Qamhiyah, 2017, p. 30).

6- The Role of Media Education in Promoting the Safe and Positive Use of Social Media Among Children

The rapid expansion of information and communication technology (ICT) and its profound impact on individuals' lives across various sectors have raised concerns, especially in light of the overwhelming media and information explosion. This growing concern is compounded by individuals' limited ability to navigate and critically assess the information they encounter. The need for logical mechanisms to evaluate information, make accurate comparisons, and properly interpret events has become crucial. Mastery of certain 21st-century skills has thus become necessary for effectively engaging with media.

The influence of media has reached alarming levels, primarily due to two reasons. First, media content often targets the most vulnerable age groups, especially children and

adolescents, who lack sufficient awareness and guidance. Without proper defense mechanisms, young people are unable to distinguish between positive and negative content. Second, there is a stark contrast between the nature of media and the family or school environment. Media is often easy, simple, captivating, and geared towards inclinations and imagination, while the family and school represent more challenging environments that require effort, critical thinking, and detachment from personal desires (Janat, 2016, p. 02).

For educational and media institutions, it has become imperative to devise a clear and empowering methodology to counter the imminent dangers posed by unfiltered media. Governments are concerned about their security and the well-being of their citizens, and there is an urgent need to develop effective strategies and plans to address the negative impacts of the media. Media education plays a central role in this effort. It focuses on enhancing individuals' critical abilities, particularly for children and youth, in evaluating and processing the constant stream of information from various media sources. It also empowers individuals to understand the functions of the media in democratic societies and equips them with the skills necessary to assess the content, understand its sources, and critically analyze its purpose.

6-1 Successful International Experiences in Media Education for Children

In recent decades, numerous developed countries have demonstrated a growing interest in advancing media education for children, driven by an increasing awareness of its pivotal role in fostering a generation capable of engaging with digital media in a critical, informed, and responsible manner. While these international experiences have differed in terms of their pedagogical approaches, curricular frameworks, and implementation strategies, they consistently converge on a fundamental principle: placing the child at the center of the media education process. This is achieved by integrating media literacy competencies into both formal educational curricula and extracurricular initiatives, thereby promoting holistic media awareness and cultivating responsible digital citizenship from an early age.

A-The Canadian Experience: The Media Literacy Curriculum in Ontario Canada is recognized as one of the pioneering nations in the field of media literacy education, having acknowledged early on the importance of equipping young learners with critical thinking skills and digital media awareness in response to the growing influence of media technologies. Notably, the Province of Ontario emerged as a global leader by incorporating media literacy as a compulsory component of its official school curriculum as early as 1987, thus establishing it as a foundational element within its educational system (Pungente et al., 2005).

This comprehensive educational program targets children starting from the primary level, featuring a progressively structured and developmentally appropriate series of contents and activities designed to align with the cognitive and social capacities of young learners. The curriculum emphasizes the development of competencies in the following areas:

- Analyzing diverse media messages, including advertisements, films, and news reports.
- Identifying and interpreting both explicit and implicit content within media materials.

- Distinguishing between credible and unreliable sources of information.
- Recognizing propaganda techniques and ideological objectives embedded in certain media narratives.

In terms of practical application, Canadian educational institutions supplement theoretical instruction with a range of experiential activities aimed at reinforcing media literacy competencies. These include:

- Workshops on short film production.
- Competitions for designing socially responsible advertisements.
- Practical sessions focused on detecting and analyzing fake news and misleading digital content.

According to evaluation reports issued by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2016), this program has produced measurable positive outcomes, including:

- Enhancing children's ability to critically and consciously engage with various forms of media content.
- Reducing their vulnerability to manipulative advertising and harmful media messages.
- Strengthening their skills in creating responsible, creative, and meaningful digital content.
- This successful model continues to serve as a valuable reference for countries seeking to introduce or improve media literacy initiatives within their own educational systems.

B-The Finnish Experience: Finland is internationally recognized as one of the pioneering nations in the systematic integration of media education within a comprehensive national policy framework. In 2004, the country launched the National Media Education Project, which has since been regarded as one of the most successful international initiatives in this field (Kupiainen, 2019). The primary objective of this project is to institutionalize media literacy and digital education across all levels of the educational system, from early childhood programs to higher education institutions.

The project is structured around four fundamental pillars:

- Developing critical thinking skills among children, enabling them to analyze diverse media content and discern both explicit and implicit messages.
- Combating misinformation, hate speech, and harmful digital content through targeted training in fact-checking techniques and critical evaluation of information sources.
- Promoting responsible digital content creation by offering practical workshops in which children produce media materials that reflect values such as tolerance, empathy, and responsible digital citizenship.
- Raising awareness of digital privacy and data protection, educating children on personal safety practices within digital environments.

Furthermore, Finland was among the first countries to formally incorporate digital and media education into its national curriculum, ensuring that these competencies are addressed systematically at each educational level. The Finnish government has also institutionalized ongoing professional development programs for educators and parents, aimed at fostering an

educational environment that actively supports responsible and informed engagement with media and digital communication technologies (Kotilainen & Kupiainen, 2014).

C-The Australian Experience: the federal government has implemented a series of preventive and educational initiatives targeting children, adolescents, and their parents. Among these, the Think U Know Australia program stands out as a particularly prominent and effective model. Developed through a collaborative partnership involving the Australian Federal Police, educational institutions, and civil society organizations, the program responds to increasing concerns regarding children's and young people's exposure to online risks and challenges.

The program's primary objectives are to:

- Educate children about potential dangers associated with internet use and social media platforms.
- Provide them with practical strategies for safeguarding their digital privacy.
- Equip them with the skills necessary to handle cyberbullying and exposure to harmful or inappropriate online content.
- Its operational framework includes:
 - On-site workshops in schools, tailored to suit different age groups.
 - Online training modules designed to complement classroom sessions.
 - Pedagogical resources and instructional guides for teachers, ensuring the integration of media literacy principles into the broader school curriculum.

Evaluation studies and impact assessment reports have consistently confirmed the program's effectiveness in enhancing children's awareness of digital risks and improving their media literacy competencies. These reports have documented a measurable reduction in children's exposure to online risks and an increased capacity to critically assess digital content and engage responsibly in online environments (Notley et al., 2020; Australian Federal Police, 2022).

It is clear from reviewing these experiences that media education has become an essential component within advanced educational systems, as it is treated as a strategic mechanism to protect children and enable them to interact consciously and safely with digital media. Most of these experiences agree on the necessity of integrating media education into the official school curricula, organizing awareness campaigns through the media, and training teachers and parents to ensure the effectiveness of educational programs directed to children.

6-2 The Reality of Media Education in the Arab World:

In a comparable context, an examination of the current state of media education in the Arab world, as reflected in recent scholarly literature, reveals that media education in Arab countries remains limited and in its formative stages, particularly when compared to the more advanced experiences of nations such as Finland, Canada, and Australia (Al-Jaber, 2018; UNESCO, 2022). Despite the growing awareness among Arab governments of the escalating risks associated with digital content and the increasing rates of children's and adolescents' use of social media platforms, the absence of a comprehensive and unified strategy at both national and regional levels—alongside reliance on fragmented, inconsistent initiatives—

constitutes one of the most significant barriers to achieving effective and sustainable media education within Arab digital environments.

- **Absence of Institutional and Structural Frameworks :**

Studies by Al-Bahrani (2019) and Dabbous and Nasser (2017) indicate that most Arab countries have yet to systematically integrate media education into their formal school curricula. Efforts in this regard are predominantly confined to isolated or seasonal initiatives, often undertaken by certain associations or media organizations. Furthermore, ministries of education in the Arab region largely lack coherent policies to formally structure and guide media and digital education initiatives for children and adolescents.

- **Lack of Specialized Academic Training for Educators:**

A recent UNESCO study (2022) highlighted a pronounced deficiency in specialized training for Arab teachers in the fields of media and digital education. This shortfall restricts educators' capacity to effectively integrate these critical concepts into classroom practices. As a result, the prevailing approach to information and communication technology within schools tends to prioritize cautionary and preventive messaging over empowerment, critical engagement, and awareness-building.

- **Fragility of the Digital Environment and Weak Preventive Regulation:**

Reports such as the Arab Social Media Report (2021) emphasize that Arab children are frequently exposed to high rates of cyberbullying, misinformation, and inappropriate content. This vulnerability is largely attributable to weak digital regulatory frameworks and the absence of comprehensive national programs for preventive digital education—issues that are particularly pronounced in conflict-affected or socioeconomically fragile areas.

- **Isolated Individual and Organizational Initiatives:**

Despite these challenges, several noteworthy initiatives have been implemented at the national and regional levels, including:

-The Salamat program in Jordan and Lebanon, developed in cooperation with UNESCO, aimed at promoting children's digital safety.

-The Media Education Project in Morocco, launched by the Ministry of National Education in 2020 as a pilot initiative in select educational institutions.

However, these initiatives remain limited in terms of both temporal duration and geographic coverage, and they often lack mechanisms for systematic evaluation and institutional scalability (Elmasry & Chaudhry, 2020).

Thus, media education serves as a preventive tool to safeguard the minds of children and protect them from harmful external influences, ensuring they are equipped with cultural knowledge and positive values. It fosters rational dialogue in the face of confusion and intellectual extremism, offering a defense against negative foreign and external influences. In this context, media education has emerged as a significant global trend, particularly in developed countries, recognizing its importance in helping individuals, especially children and adolescents, effectively navigate the media landscape.

Abdel Wahab Boukhnoufa emphasizes the need to educate children about the nature of modern communication tools, their operations, and the meanings they convey. This includes teaching young people how to decode symbols, images, sounds, and texts that make up media

messages (Umm Al-Rutm and Awaj, 2018, p. 766). British Minister of Culture, Tessa Jowell, similarly advocates for media education, asserting that familiarity with media standards in the current century is as crucial as mastering mathematics and science (Medfouni and Google, 2020, p. 101).

Media education is not just a defense mechanism against harmful media content; it is also an empowerment project. It prepares individuals to understand and engage with the media culture around them, select and use media responsibly, and participate in media creation and dissemination in a meaningful way. By adopting media education, individuals can open up to other cultures and civilizational achievements, benefiting from the intellectual, social, and cultural experiences of others, while filtering out content that contradicts societal values and beliefs. This approach also promotes national pride and encourages the preservation of cultural identity.

Conclusion:

In light of the research points discussed above, it can be concluded that the continuous advancements in the field of modern communication and information technologies have profoundly reshaped the dynamics of societies and their social structures. In this evolving digital environment, individuals — and particularly children — are constantly surrounded by an overwhelming volume of media messages, some of which align with their values, ethics, and cultural identity, while others promote distorted, unethical, and harmful content.

It has become evident that it is neither feasible nor possible to entirely shield individuals, especially younger generations, from exposure to the diverse and pervasive modern communication platforms, notably social networking sites. Consequently, the importance of media education and its associated competencies emerges as an essential mechanism for protecting children from the potential negative consequences associated with the use of contemporary media technologies.

Media education offers a structured framework for cultivating children's ability to critically analyze media content, develop informed and conscious responses to the messages they encounter, and acquire the knowledge and practical skills necessary to engage with digital media in a responsible and constructive manner. This is particularly crucial in preserving the social stability of societies, especially within Islamic and Algerian contexts, where media-induced phenomena increasingly pose challenges to traditional values and communal cohesion.

Accordingly, empowering children with media literacy is not merely a preventive measure, but a proactive educational strategy that equips future generations to navigate the digital age with awareness, discernment, and resilience. Based on the aforementioned analysis and in light of contemporary educational and media literature, this study proposes a set of developmental measures aimed at enhancing media education practices in Arab contexts, as follows:

1. Integrating media education as a fundamental component within educational curricula, beginning at the primary education level, through the allocation of dedicated instructional units that address the safe, critical, and responsible use of digital media.

2. Launching national awareness campaigns focused on promoting the safe and responsible use of social networking platforms, targeting children, adolescents, parents, and educators alike.
3. Implementing systematic training programs for teachers on digital media education concepts and pedagogical skills, delivered through accredited courses and continuous professional development frameworks.
4. Promoting the concept of media education and its associated skills by organizing conferences, workshops, and local forums, with the aim of disseminating media education culture among the general public, with a particular emphasis on children and adolescents as the most vulnerable and targeted segments of society.
5. Adopting successful international models, particularly the Finnish experience, by designing a comprehensive national project for media education that integrates educational, social, and cultural dimensions in a coherent and contextually adapted framework.
6. Fostering partnerships among ministries of education, media institutions, and civil society organizations to collaboratively develop appropriate digital pedagogical content and awareness programs tailored to the needs of children and young people.
7. Establishing specialized research units and academic programs on media education within Arab universities and research centers, in order to produce localized knowledge and evidence-based practices in the field.
8. Enacting regulatory legislation and child protection frameworks to safeguard children from harmful digital content, in parallel with preventive and awareness-based educational initiatives.

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