

MEDIA LITERACY: BUILDING CHILDREN'S FOUNDATIONAL ETHIC FOR LIVING IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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Abstract. Today we live in a world where media, especially the electronic and digital, have experienced a tremendous explosion. They affect the personal and socio-cultural life of digital society, including children who begin to use digital media at an early age. There are emerging demands to empower children with a set of analytical skills to negotiate the risks and opportunities of online activities and encourage them to express themselves aesthetically and by forming attitudes, moral standards, and principles as the ethical foundation for living in the digital media environment. This article employed library research with a qualitative approach. References are derived from relevant books, statutory documents, journals, scientific articles, and research reports. After the data is collected, it is analyzed by reducing the data, presenting the data, and drawing conclusions. Research results revealed that media literacy is imperative for children to ethically and responsibly navigate the complexities of this ever-changing media environment.

Keywords: media literacy, children, digital ethic, digital skill, digital well-being

1. INTRODUCTION

Information and communication technology today has grown and developed so rapidly. It is now difficult to ignore the reality that a variety of information distributed through information and communication technology has flowed so fast in the daily rituals of people's lives, including the pulse of children's lives. Modern society life, characterized by a media rich-environment, increasingly raises a need for children as a special audience to empower them with the ability to use the internet healthily. Moreover, empower children with an analytical skill set to negotiate the risks and opportunities of online activities and encourage them to express themselves aesthetically and by forming attitudes, moral standards, and principles as the ethical foundation for living in the digital media environment.

Globally, children's lives in the digital technology era have undergone dramatic changes compared to the baby boomer generation. Children as digital natives consume digital media intensely and greedily, and the delineation can be traced from the penetration data of Indonesian internet users that the majority of internet users, including children in them, access the internet for more than 8 hours every day with smartphones, laptops, tablets, and smartphones or other digital applications (Asosiasi Penyelenggara Jasa Internet Indonesia, 2022).

Children spend most of their leisure time playing with digital technologies. Therefore, media literacy is critically needed for children coming to age in an intensively media-saturated environment. For that reason, children need to have the skills to access, analyze, evaluate, and ethically communicate with various kinds of digital technologies and be positive contributors to our digital society (Silverblatt, 2018).

For Ferrés (2012), media literacy is not an option but the birthright of all citizens. It is unlike other countries such as Finland and Slovenia (Rek, 2019; Tanriverdi & Apak, 2010). Promoting media literacy among children in Indonesia is quite challenging because media literacy education contextualized for children is still unavailable

(Hasibuan, 2022); it is not even on the radar of educational policies. Indeed, some critical questions arise about how to prepare children to be cognizant of media literacy and who takes responsibility for inoculating those skills to children.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Media Literacy

People of different ages have a huge access to myriad sources of internet in the day of technology driven environment right now (Kurnia et al., 2017; Lazonder et al., 2020). Having access to media and digital technologies enable everyone to participate in democracy environment, and media literacy promote people to engage effectively in a rich media environment.

Children also begin to play with media and digital technologies from early age, and they should be promoted to rehearse the social practice of media literacy (Marsh, 2019). Ultimately, children are used to face the opportunities and challenges for living in the digital age (J. Ohler, 2011).

2.2 Media Literacy Education

This is unimaginable to see people spend their daily live without media and technology in this technological-driven culture. While people, especially children spend their daily activities in front of screen technology, they should be taught how to navigate this digital landscapes. Media literacy education is a process of developing competencies of people to have a critical eyes on the use of digital technologies and understanding about media influences (Kupiainen & Kotilainen, 2015).

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This article employed library research with a qualitative approach (Sugiyono, 2016). References are derived from relevant books, statutory documents, journals, scientific articles, and research reports. Qualitative research focuses on the meaning of the phenomena studied. Qualitative research generally interprets life phenomena, even ordinary or extraordinary ones, including those related to current communication technology (Jensen, 2013).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The development of technology and the globalization of media unlocked spaces for people of all ages to participate in the changing media landscape. Children are part of the digital community that intensely painted the democratic life of a media-saturated society. Children do not grow in a vacuum. Instead, they connected to the larger social context as digital natives who play, learn, and socialize in the hustle and bustle of the global village.

Children begin to experience using digital technologies at a very early age. They are effortlessly fluent in digital games, listen to music on phones and tablets, and they incredibly do not master these skills from the guidance of parents (Hasibuan, 2016). Unfortunately, children's digital fluency does not quarantine that they know how to use internet technologies safely, responsibly, and ethically.

As the use of media became more widespread among children, they should have adequate skills on how to use media intelligently, to discriminate and evaluate media content, to critically dissect media forms, to investigate media effects and uses, and to construct alternative media (Kellner & Share, 2005).

Potter (2019) asserts that media literacy "as a continuum"; it represents a continuum of progress indicators that identify the degree of skills or competencies children should achieve with never-ending learning opportunities and challenges. Sometimes, these skills unsteadily decrease or increase across situations. Furthermore, there is always room for improvement.

We should take responsibility for looking after the children and scaffold them along the continuum for building resiliency and an ethical foundation to participate in a media-rich environment.

Contemporary children are social actors who participate in the wave of technological advancement; they dig out their social and cultural practices of the 21st

century through interaction with computers, tablets, mobile phones, digital games, and digital media (Coulter, 2020). Furthermore, children seem to be more confident in constructing their identities as having naturally digital generation genes when they are born, by stepping away from traditional and turning to a world of digital technology to maintain social relationships, to meet self-satisfaction like playing digital games (Ivanović, 2014), for some cases in Indonesia, children develop their social relations with peer in the so-called “internet café” environment (Salman Hasibuan, 2016).

Nowadays, discussions regarding a digital generation have been prevailing the public discourse relating the role of digital media in the life of preschool children (Ciboci & Osmančević, 2019; Graafland, 2018). Particularly, children's daily activities are showcased with almost endless access to the internet and digital games. Accordingly, various groups of adult began to question to what extent technology affects children's live and how to encourage children to use the media as much as possible for educational purposes (Erstad, 2015). In this situation, media literacy provides the groundwork for educational approaches which enable children to creatively and critically use technology (Ivanović, 2014) and pave the way to acquiring skills required for learning in the 21st century (Thoman & Jolls, 2004).

At the time of 1980 media literacy had become an extensive discussion, it has been considered as a global concern on the international agenda as well as national agenda in many countries (Carlson & Weber, 2012). This is actually a momentum of recognition that media literacy education is urgent in every region of the world has become commonplace.

Renowned visioner academic, Marshall McLuhan (1996) (as cited in De Abreu, 2020) foresees that technology and media are expanding in scope and reach. These situations generate demands for schools to accommodate learning opportunities for students to gain knowledge and experience about technology and information they face at the current time.

Schools and teachers need to understand the impact of digital media and technologies have on preschool children. The increasing intensity of children's participation in the rapidly changing digital world validates that the use of digital media and technology is becoming more important and justifies a rationale for schools and teachers to integrate media literacy into educational systems and to put media literacy in place as important as literacy (Akçayoglu & Daggol, 2019).

Media literacy should be taught early to empower preschool children to be media literate and to be an informed citizens with critical thinking skills so that children can participate positively in the increasingly digital society (Gebru, 2020; Potter, 2016). Tolić (2009) (as cited in Ivanović, 2014) regards that preschool children can achieve media literacy. Teachers can stimulate the critical thinking of preschool children through building the capability to access, evaluate, and process media (Sachdeva & Tripahti, 2019).

Today almost impossible to argue that media literacy education is not important for preschool students in Indonesia. Nevertheless, teachers may be grappling with challenges of how to develop media literacy education for preschool children.

4.1 Teaching Media Literacy

Children do not grow in isolation. Instead, they connected to larger social entities as digital natives who learn, play, and socialize in the digital media environment. Nowadays, media exposure begins earlier than before, and it becomes more extensive in the lives of children. Children's excessive use of digital media contributes to calls for adults, parents, teachers, and decision-makers to empower children to navigate the digital media culture.

Media literacy is a critical instrument to minimize potential adverse risks to children when exposed to abundant inappropriate media content. The degree to which children have adequate skills to discriminate between fantasy and reality and evaluate media content, to use media wisely, to critically dissect media forms (Kellner & Share, 2005).

Many scholars envisage media literacy help children to participate and engage with media technologies in a safe and ethical manner (Jenkins, 2009). Children's active participation in the digital environment has often yielded a heated debate about who is

responsible for educating children with this set of media literacy skills.

Scholars have a different points of view about who among adults around children at the micro, meso, or macro level should be an effective agent to facilitate children's media literacy skills. One side views families have a crucial role in supporting children's learning where children elicit almost as much general knowledge about the world (Plowman et al., 2011). According to the Convention on the Right of Child parents have primary responsibility for nurturing and upbringing of the child, and these responsibilities also attached to the process of teaching media literacy (Ciboci et al., 2014). Contradictory, there are concerns about how parents help children to be media literate and how they teach these set skills when there are indications that many parents do not know what to do to make children select, evaluate and use media ethically and full of self-regulation (Potter, 2016).

So many questions arise when we look at the extent to which parents take a role in children's literacy education in family life. Concerns emerged about parents providing media literacy reinforcement to their children while they do not have these competencies. Do parents have the insight to discriminate between fact and manipulative information? These questions are only part of the puzzle that will develop our doubts about parents' media literacy skills.

Teaching media literacy to an individual is known as activities executed to develop competencies in media literacy through educational processes, and this process is well-known as the outcome of media literacy education (Hobbs, 2019). Media literacy education is the pedagogical process of inoculating knowledge and skills about media leading to media literacy (Gebru, 2020). For the sake of increasing children's understanding of how media works and how to use them, parents should take part in the pedagogical process of imparting knowledge, skills, and awareness about the ethical and social value of using digital technologies at home.

Excessive media use, particularly among children, occurs to a large extent within a family context, and it became evident that adults in the environment themselves are a bunch of agents in shaping media habits. Ideally, parents are role models that play a glorious role in children's digital lives. Parents can accustom children to balance harmonious social relations when immersed their life in the digital environment. But, most of the research indicated that parents have little competencies in the media literacy area, and they conceived themselves are insufficiently media literate, and parents have expressed great trust in teachers to take over their responsibilities (Lepičnik, 2011). As Henry Jenkins wrote, "Parents receive so little advice about how to confront the real challenges of navigating the digital environment which is unfamiliar to them and often to their children" (Collier, 2014). To what extent parents can play a great important role to stimulate children's media competence in a highly media-rich environment still provoke pros and cons.

Other scholars viewed teachers have a more strategic role in influencing the children's knowledge of media through media literacy initiatives to foster children's media competencies (Rek, 2019). Teachers can help students become media literate by teaching them how to grapple with the opportunities and risks associated with media (Simons et al., 2017). Teachers still gain the trust of parents, scholars, and social activists that they play a significant role in fostering students' greater critical awareness about media (McNelly & Harvey, 2021; Media, 1983), and the school setting is regarded as a convenient arena to promote media literacy concept to children.

Media literacy is potentially viewed as a tool for the moral development of children, mainly while it is extremely impossible to prevent children from exposure to media or even exposure to aggressive online games (Potter, 2019). And media literacy education for children has been cited as a pathway to creating character education programs tuned to children as digital natives, which is intended to cope with the opportunities and challenges of living a digital lifestyle (J. Ohler, 2011). Although it represents an educational process which tends to develop children who will be critical, autonomous, and aware of the potential harm of exposure to aggressive, sexual and inappropriate commercial media content.

Research reveals that children have exposed to media technologies at earlier ages, and access to media are an integral part of children's daily activities (Rek, 2019).

For that reason, teachers play a critical role in ensuring that students have adequate skills to navigate their lives in a highly immersed media-rich environment.

Media literacy can be started at an early age, and children can likely acquire media literacy to be competent to discriminate between good and destructive media content (Ivanović, 2014). Ohler (2010) elaborates principles that are needed to address media literacy, namely:

1. Promotes essence ethical values and supportive performance values as the foundation of a good character in all communities, whether local, global, or digital.
2. Defines “character” intensively to include thinking, feeling, and behavior concerning both onsite and online activities.
3. Use a comprehensive, intentional, and proactive approach to character development.
4. Creates a caring school community.
5. Provides students with opportunities for moral action, including prescribing guided access to the internet.
6. Engage families and community members as partners in the character-building efforts.

4.2 Looking for Contextual Learning Model

Learning media literacy is regarded as a critical skill set in the 21st century. Furthermore, media literacy education as a pedagogical process of inoculating skill set that believed can equip children with knowledge and awareness of media consequences brought to them (Martens & Hobbs, 2015).

While considering research that failure or success of media literacy planned activities in schools rely on some aspects of the knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and actions of the teachers in order to effectively integrate media literacy initiatives within lesson plans of their classroom (Hattani et al., 2019; McNelly & Harvey, 2021; Mesko et al., 2015).

Mapping media literacy practices and initiatives worldwide makes it possible for us to understand and evaluate media literacy initiatives in Indonesia, whether in the local or national context. Several countries in the world are racing to strengthen their citizens through media literacy education. European countries and the US are largely well-known pioneers in the development of media literacy education at the global level. For example, Finland and Slovenia are one depiction of success stories about integrating digital media-related experiences into early childhood education (Quicke, 2022; Rek, 2019).

Another media literacy initiative comes from the work of Decarlo et al. (2017). They develop strategies and techniques for promoting children with digital literacy skills using the I-LEARN model in early childhood education settings. The model potentially becomes a valuable lesson learned about how to encourage children to identify, locate, evaluate, apply, reflect, and know information from computers.

Early childhood education is a foundation phase for flourishing children's character. Indeed, empowering children's character in the digital environment by providing them with effective tools to explore, express, engage, and participate in appropriate and responsible behavior play a critical role in reinforcing and strengthening etiquette (Nansen et al., 2012).

Teachers and scholars should take part in developing contextual learning models to reinforce and strengthen children's digital well-being. Developing children's digital well-being means introducing them to be aware of the health impact of media use (mentally, emotionally, and socially) and promoting balance between media use and other activities (Lauricella et al., 2020).

The success of seeding media literacy skills among children will intuitively invigorate their capacities to participate in a global digital society in an active, responsible, autonomous, and safe manner. Thus, these experience allow children to exercise their digital ethics in the information and communication society.

CONCLUSION

Promoting media literacy to children means inoculating important seeds for cultivating life virtue for living in the media-saturated society as Potter (2019) states that media literacy is a continuum where there is always space for improvement along the life span. Therefore, equipping children with media literacy at an early age hopefully will pave the way for children to navigate digital life and participate fully in the disruptive media environment.

Starting earlier to prepare children with media literacy skills is critical, and it is developmentally appropriate and yields positive effects (Lauricella et al., 2020). Hereinafter, teaching media literacy skills at an early age means inoculating character education for children, so this good practice could be fundamental for the following continuum in the future.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors thank to the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of Indonesia for the fund support through Beasiswa Unggulan.

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