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Best practices and areas for improvement in promoting the media literacy of adults in Finland

Extended summary

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*The study on best practices and areas for improvement in promoting the media literacy of adults aimed to describe what the promotion of adults' media literacy means in practice in today's Finland, what kinds of challenges are related to it, and how the problems can be solved. In the study, the objective was to find and describe concrete operating models and best practices through which the promotion of adults' media literacy could be developed to become as comprehensive, high-quality and systematic as possible, in accordance with the objectives of the **National media education policy** (2019).*



Conducting the Study

The study was conducted by the Centre for Cultural Policy Research CUPORE in cooperation with the National Audiovisual Institute KAVI in autumn 2020 and spring 2021. The data for the qualitative study were collected at the turn of the year 2020–2021 by interviewing 20 experts, who work on adults' media literacy in various ways. This means that the interviewees represent only a fraction of the broad field of adults' media education. The interviewees represent the fields of non-formal adult education, libraries, media, research, and administration, and the third sector. When selecting the interviewees, the aim was to take the various target groups and perspectives of adults' media education into consideration and find operators from the various fields of promoting adults' media literacy and from different parts of Finland.

Media literacy was seen as a multifaceted entity, and emphases varied by the focus of the interviewees' own work. Concepts that were considered related to media literacy included media literacies, information literacy, multiliteracy, digital literacy, usage skills, safety skills, interpretation skills, interaction and communication skills, and creative skills.

Current situation and challenges of the adults' media education in Finland

During the interviews, experts were asked to consider the challenges in their own work aiming to promote adults' media education, as well as factors that promote or support their work on media literacy. After this, they were asked to assess the field's general situation in Finland: what the essential challenges in the field are and which factors support the work.

According to the interviewees, there are a lot of organisations, experts and professional competence in the field of media education in Finland. This supports the work done on media literacy and allows operators to reach various target groups. Finland also has structures that promote different activities and initiatives, which is a good situation if compared on an international level. Despite this, there is little media education activity directed specifically at adults. Even though the activities aimed at adults have been increasing, they were seen as being 'in their infancy' compared to the media education for children and young people. Adults are also a challenging target group. Adults vary greatly from each other by age, life situation, media skills and habits, which must be considered when directing the activities.

Furthermore, adults are not covered by any organisation that reaches the entire age group – such as formal education system, and therefore do not form any single, coherent target audience for media education. Therefore, those working in media education are actively searching for ways of reaching their audience and communicating about their activities.

For operators that promote media literacy, media education is quite rarely the organisation's core activity. Some operators in the field may not recognise that their operations involve promoting media literacy if media education is only a small part of other operations or if it does not have a defined position in the strategic plans. Cooperation networks were seen as an essential factor in promoting media education work forward in the field. Through networking, people share information and best practices, develop their operations, and save resources. At the same time, networking also involves challenges. When building cooperation models, finding a common understanding was sometimes seen as difficult due to the varying operators (of which many have different target groups or different objectives) and because there are few operators working on adults' media literacy on a large scale. In addition to this, there were often limited resources for building and maintaining networks.

For the moment, funding instruments similar to those for media education for children and young people have not been available for adults' media education. The funding for media education is typically directed to a specific field or sector, which makes it difficult to find funding for cooperation across them. Generally, funding is also project-based, which again contributes to the fragmentation of the field and operations. Project-form operations disrupt continuation and make it more difficult to instil the results in permanent operations. The interviewed experts saw that a lack of programmes, plans, and strategies contributed to the overall lack of planning in the field of adults' media education. They also expressed a need for stronger coordination of networks and operations.

Best practices

Sharing best practices on promoting media literacy provides an opportunity for different organisations to reflect and develop their own practices. Keeping this in mind, the interviewees were asked to name working methods or operating models which they considered viable for promoting adults' media literacy.

Instead of traditional teaching, collaborative learning and discussions were seen more feasible in adults' media education. Similarly, learning should approach

different topics from the premises and everyday needs of the target groups. Designing the content in a right way and integrating media education elements into other interesting activities motivates people to participate. In this case, media education may be included in the activities as a kind of a hidden agenda. Peer activities were seen as a feasible working method with participants of various ages and varying functional capacities, since peers have a good idea of the target group's needs and ways of thinking. Similarly, using one's own language and taking cultural characteristics into account make the activities accessible and easy to approach. In addition to these, planning the needs and objectives together with the target group was seen as helpful in identifying underlying needs and increasing the media education operator's understanding of the field, which makes it easier to find relevant working methods. The interviewees believe that, when attempting to reach adults, the varying habits and skills of using media need to be taken into consideration. In this case, communications via as many channels as possible is one solution. Methods based on digitalisation, such as digital support via remote connections, are already in use, and further potential for expansion was seen in them. In addition to facilitating contact with the target group, digitalisation allows for producing content through gamification, for example.

According to the interviewees, networking with operators outside one's own field opens opportunities for developing the activities and initiatives and reaching the target group. Some operators had productised their media education by compiling materials that can be easily applied to various operators, or by conceptualising and openly sharing best practices. According to the operators, this saves resources and prevents overlapping work, at its best. However, the benefits are even more extensive, since this brings the systematic approach into media education. According to the interviewed operators, it is helpful in the promotion of media literacy if media education has been identified and named and it has its own position, either as a separate plan or as a part of the strategy of a larger operator, such as a municipality. In this case, allocating resources to media education works better and it is easier to defend its necessity both inside the organisation and in relation to outside parties.





The future – wishes and solutions

In relation to the proposed actions in the media education policy, the experts were asked, how the promotion of adults' media literacy should be developed in Finland at different levels – locally, regionally, and nationally – to make it as comprehensive, high-quality and systematic as possible. In other words, the perspective focused on identifying the current need for promotion of adults' media literacy, even if the field in Finland already has plenty of good and high-quality activities, initiatives and proficient operators.

The experts' key suggestions were related to increasing systematic approach to media education through coordination and instruction: strategic guidance and support, coordinating and developing cooperation between operators, supporting regional operations, and compiling and sharing best practices and research data related to media education. Other suggestions included raising awareness of media literacy, strengthening the research-based approach on media literacy, strengthening competence and pedagogical support for adults' media education, and developing cross-sector and cross-administration funding instruments for adults' media education.

For more information:

Full report (in Finnish):

<https://medialukutaitosuomessa.fi/aikuistenmedialukutaito.pdf>

Media literacy in Finland:

<https://medialukutaitosuomessa.fi/en/>

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Finnish media literacy policy

Media literacy in Finland is the media literacy policy and the national media education policy document, published by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2019.

Full policy document:

<https://medialukutaitosuomessa.fi/mediaeducation-policy.pdf>

Publisher

National Audiovisual Institute

The National Audiovisual Institute (KAVI), with its Department for Media Education and Audiovisual Media (MEKU), has a legal task to promote media education in Finland. KAVI is a subordinate of the Ministry of Education and Culture and acts in cooperation with stakeholders.

Contact information in KAVI:

<https://kavi.fi/en/contact-information/>

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NATIONELLA AUDIOVISUELLA INSTITUTET
NATIONAL AUDIOVISUAL INSTITUTE





**Co-financed by the Connecting Europe
Facility of the European Union**

NATIONAL AUDIOVISUAL INSTITUTE 2/2021.
ISBN 978-952-69808-6-7 (PDF)

WWW.MEDIALITERACY.FI