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Components of the Media Literacy Curriculum in the Elementary Education Period of Iraq's Education System

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The aim of the present study was to identify the components of the media literacy curriculum in the elementary education period of Iraq's education system.

Methods: The research method employed was synthesis research based on an analogy model and grounded in Klein's framework. The research scope in the synthesis phase, aimed at identifying the pattern's components, included reference texts on media literacy and media literacy education from the years 2010 to 2025. In the synthesis research section, 47 sources were purposefully examined. The data collection method for conducting the synthesis research was library-based, and the research tool in the synthesis phase was note-taking. Data analysis was performed using the synthesis research method.

Results: The results indicated that the goals of the media literacy curriculum in the elementary period, at the general level, involve achieving media culture, while the detailed goals include empowering elementary school students (encompassing cognitive strengthening through increasing media awareness and reforming media attitudes, enhancing analysis and moderating emotions, strengthening social skills, and integrating acquired capabilities) and empowering elementary school teachers (including strengthening teachers' media literacy—encompassing general media literacy, specialized media literacy, and ethical media literacy—training in creating new media, enhancing teachers' professional ethics, and improving teacher education).

Conclusions: The overall conclusion demonstrated that media literacy, as one of the vital skills in the information technology era, plays a significant role in empowering elementary school students to understand and analyze media messages.

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Introduction

The elementary school period is a critical developmental stage in which students experience emotional, physical, and psychological growth. It is essential for teachers and parents to recognize the diverse characteristics of students at this age to more effectively address their various needs ([Rashtchi & Khoshnevisan, 2019](#)). Furthermore, the elementary period holds significant importance in fostering and nurturing students' talents. Media literacy is defined as the ability to access media, critically understand and evaluate various aspects and contents of media, and create communications across diverse contexts ([Rasi et al., 2019](#)). Media literacy is also conceptualized as the capacity to access and utilize media, produce messages and engage with media, and critically analyze and evaluate media content ([Hobbs & Jensen, 2009](#); [Salari et al., 2024](#)). Its primary goal is to establish a logical, cost-benefit-based relationship with media, meaning individuals must assess what they stand to lose and gain from media engagement. Therefore, one of the core objectives of media literacy is to ensure informed and beneficial use of information ([Salariyan et al., 2020](#)). Media literacy education has served as one of the most effective supervisory and identity-forming strategies for over four decades, particularly in the policy-making of developed countries and major media owners ([Hosseini et al., 2021](#)). It has evolved into a tool for reproducing, sustaining, and reinforcing the dominance of Western identity over non-Western ones ([Torkzadeh et al., 2019](#)). Consequently, media literacy is currently taught as a curriculum subject in the educational systems of many countries, including the United Kingdom, Australia, South Africa, Canada, the United States, and Japan, while it is under development in New Zealand, Italy, Greece, Austria, Sweden, Denmark, and Switzerland ([Torkzadeh et al., 2019](#)). Media literacy education for students pursues multiple objectives, including fostering creative, critical, and analytical thinking toward media content and functions, as well as recognizing visual forms of communication alongside other skills such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening ([Salariyan et al., 2020](#)). [Sanders \(2014\)](#) argues that media literacy not only teaches the reading of overt messages from various media but also equips audiences to interpret the "unwritten lines" in print media, view unprogrammed content, or listen to broadcast sounds from electronic media. For instance, a

media-literate individual is aware of media goals and conventions and uses them consciously. In other words, media literacy encompasses understanding the technical (functional) and social complexities of media, which enhances the ability to analyze and evaluate messages and empowers individuals to produce and disseminate information in various formats using diverse tools. Media literacy education empowers individuals to comprehend how media operate and their underlying logic, recognize the nature and objectives of media message production, and examine the effects and techniques of different media, thereby reducing the negative impacts of media on vulnerable societal groups ([Bilotserkovets et al., 2021](#)).

A review of existing studies indicates that while research on media literacy design has been conducted both domestically and internationally, the design of a media literacy curriculum specifically for the elementary education period in Iraq's education system has been overlooked. Attention to this age group is crucial because, in all global education systems, the elementary period is recognized as the most important phase of schooling, during which personality formation and holistic individual development primarily occur. Additionally, when younger children use media (such as mobile phones and virtual spaces), parents can easily access their content ([Notley & Dezuanni, 2019](#)). However, children aged 9 to 12 are at a stage where they are likely to begin interacting with others online without strict parental supervision. Moreover, due to internet use for school assignments, these children may formally have their own social media accounts without a proper understanding of the complexities of social interactions.

Elementary school students, due to their sensitive cognitive, emotional, and psychological characteristics, are particular media audiences; their minds are not fully shaped by social conventions, making media play a fundamental role in their socialization during this educational period. If educational opportunities are missed under the pretext of it being too early, students' habits may solidify by older ages, making reform difficult—a pattern evident in studies on media literacy education in secondary and higher education ([Boronenko et al., 2020](#); [Hosseini et al., 2021](#); [Wuyckens et al., 2022](#)).

Furthermore, an examination of domestic and international research on the topic reveals that no comprehensive study has yet been conducted on the components of a media literacy

curriculum in the elementary education period of Iraq's education system; only somewhat related topics have been explored ([Celik et al., 2021](#); [Davydov et al., 2020](#); [Kahne & Bowyer, 2019](#); [Mallia et al., 2020](#); [Nazarweisi et al., 2020](#); [Stix & Jolls, 2020](#); [Yanarateş, 2020](#)). These studies have demonstrated that media literacy is one of the essential requirements of the modern era. With the growth of technologies and digital media, it has become a vital tool in shaping individuals' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. In today's world, children from an early age are exposed to various forms of media, such as television, the internet, video games, and social media. Therefore, it is imperative to design a program in elementary education to cultivate media literacy, enabling students to use media correctly and intelligently.

The importance and necessity of the present study can be highlighted from three perspectives: theoretical, research, and practical. From a theoretical standpoint, the significance of the elementary period in students' learning and future life cannot be overstated; this stage is one of the most critical in an individual's academic and personal life, where personality foundations are laid and shaped. Many problems arise from insufficient attention to this sensitive period and improper guidance during growth and development, with the roots of numerous individual issues originating here and extending to later developmental stages. Thus, student growth during the elementary period is a key determinant of individuals' health throughout their lives, offering a crucial opportunity for preventing future problems and enhancing personal skills.

Designing and implementing a media literacy curriculum in Iraq's elementary period represents a significant step toward educating a generation that is aware and capable in using media and digital technologies. By creating an appropriate, flexible program that considers Iraq's unique social and cultural conditions, a new generation can be nurtured with the ability to critically analyze and responsibly use media, becoming informed and active citizens aware of the threats and opportunities in digital spaces. Implementing this program requires collaboration among educational institutions, families, the government, and international organizations to achieve a common goal of enhancing media literacy at the national level ([Jolls & Wilson, 2014](#)).

From a research perspective, the existing gap in identifying components of a media literacy curriculum for elementary students is evident. In Iraq, the literature on media literacy dates back no more than two decades and is still regarded as a novel concept. Meanwhile, international studies have made considerable progress in media literacy worldwide. Given the necessity and importance of media literacy, most domestic research on identifying curriculum components has merely emphasized the need for this competency or measured media literacy levels in various groups based on defined indicators. Accordingly, despite the urgency of identifying media literacy curriculum components, limited operational research and actions have been undertaken in this area. From a practical perspective, the findings of the present study, in addition to strengthening theoretical knowledge on media literacy, can assist educational institutions, pedagogical experts, and curriculum planners in taking effective and efficient steps by exploring these curriculum components.

The practical importance and necessity of the present study in designing and validating a media literacy curriculum in the elementary education period of Iraq's education system are paramount. Amid rapid advancements in digital technologies and social, cultural, and economic changes, the need for media literacy education in educational systems of countries like Iraq, which are navigating various transitions, is increasingly felt. In this regard, the present study can play a fundamental role in enhancing the quality of education, particularly in media literacy instruction. This research holds special significance for Iraq's education system, as it can serve as an effective strategy for designing media literacy curricula tailored to the needs of Iraqi children.

Aligned with its objectives, it can strengthen critical thinking skills, online safety, and social participation in Iraq's future generations. The media literacy curriculum can contribute to promoting critical thinking, increasing cultural awareness, and mitigating harms from media misuse among students. Additionally, recommendations for improving content and teaching methods in this program are provided. Therefore, considering the importance of the elementary period in using traditional and modern media, the scarcity of studies on designing and validating a media literacy curriculum in the elementary education period of Iraq's education system, and the necessity of media literacy education by educational, civic, and media

institutions—given that schools are among the most important centers for media literacy education—the need for designing and validating a media literacy curriculum in the elementary education period of Iraq's education system becomes evident. Accordingly, the researchers seek to address the following question: What are the components of the media literacy curriculum in the elementary education period of Iraq's education system?

Material and Methods

The study sample consisted of reference sources (including peer-reviewed journal articles, dissertations, and theses) addressing the identification of curriculum components of media literacy at the primary education level in Iraq. In total, 47 relevant sources within the period 2010–2025 were selected through purposive sampling. The process of sampling continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, ensuring no new significant themes or concepts emerged. The selection of this specific time frame was justified by the substantial growth of research on media literacy and media literacy education during this period.

Data collection for the synthesis was conducted through documentary and library-based methods, and the primary research tool in the synthesis stage was note-taking and systematic coding. Data were subsequently analyzed using the research synthesis method, enabling the integration of findings across studies.

With respect to ethical considerations, participants were assured that the questions posed were for research purposes only and that disclosure of personal information (such as names) was not required. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, with no coercion involved. Furthermore, participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the educational sessions at any stage should they wish to do so.

Results

In order to identify the curriculum components of media literacy education at the upper primary level in Iraq, the first stage of analysis involved familiarization with the data and

extraction of relevant information from the selected sources. This was followed by a process of thematic analysis and synthesis, the detailed results of which are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Identified concepts and subcomponents for designing a media literacy curriculum in primary education

Identified Components	Subcomponents
Goals	Student empowerment; cognitive competence; increasing media awareness; reshaping media-related values and attitudes; teaching emotional regulation; strengthening social skills; integrating acquired competencies; achieving media culture; regional and national policymaking; school digitalization; provision of educational resources; curriculum framework redevelopment; media literacy textbook development (aligned with policy documents, philosophy, learning principles, and local/regional conditions); needs assessment and provision of media-related instructional materials; teacher empowerment.
Media Literacy Education	Enhancing general media literacy; strengthening specialized media literacy; promoting ethical media literacy; teaching new media production; reinforcing professional ethics; improving practicum; strengthening organizational structures; family education; establishing regulatory institutions; continuous teacher evaluation; curriculum and content evaluation; advancing media education research.
Content	Functional media consumption education; enhancing media awareness; media access and use; developing media comprehension; inferential ability; technical competence (hardware and software skills); critical thinking; responsibility and accountability; motivation and active participation; critical media consumption education; content selection skills; critical comprehension and problem-solving; aesthetic appreciation; content analysis (comparison, recombination); metacognitive reinforcement; values and ethics (worldview formation, ethical development, value reformation); content production-consumption education (technical production skills, personal message creation, sharing and representation, continuous testing of outputs); critical production-consumption education (collective intelligence, social skills, reality recognition, creative and innovative idea generation).
Teaching–Learning Strategies	Teacher activities: instructional features (continuity, sequencing), teaching techniques (read-aloud instruction, technology-based learning, multimedia approaches, innovative instructional methods, constructivist strategies, psychological skills training, game-based learning). Student activities: personalized learning, active learning.
Evaluation	Assessment of prior knowledge and information; evaluation of goal achievement at each stage.
Grouping	Individual characteristics: needs, cognitive competencies; socio-emotional characteristics.
Time	Temporal flexibility.
Space	Spatial flexibility.

The findings indicate that the curriculum design for media literacy education in primary schools can be systematically categorized into the main elements of curriculum planning: goals, content, teaching–learning strategies, evaluation, grouping, time, and space.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to identify the curriculum components of media literacy education in primary schools in Iraq. The analysis revealed that the goals of the media literacy curriculum can be divided into general and specific objectives. The overarching objective is the achievement of a media culture, while the specific objectives include: (a) empowering

primary school students—by strengthening cognitive skills (increasing media awareness and reshaping media-related attitudes), enhancing emotional regulation, improving social competencies, and integrating acquired capabilities—and (b) empowering teachers—by enhancing their general, specialized, and ethical media literacy, developing their capacity to teach media production, strengthening professional ethics, and improving teacher training.

These findings are partially consistent with prior studies, including those of [Hosseini et al. \(2021\)](#), [Rashtchi and Khoshnevisan \(2019\)](#), [Salari et al. \(2024\)](#), [Wuyckens et al. \(2022\)](#), [Torkzadeh et al. \(2019\)](#) and [Lee et al. \(2015\)](#). Collectively, these studies highlight the increasing recognition of media literacy as one of the key competencies of the 21st century, particularly within educational systems worldwide.

In Iraq, the rapid growth of communication technologies and the widespread penetration of digital media into daily life make media literacy education at the primary level an urgent necessity ([Hussein et al., 2020](#)). Primary education, as the foundation of children's cognitive and behavioral development, represents the most effective stage for cultivating skills in media analysis and responsible media use. Accordingly, the findings suggest that the curriculum must encompass both cognitive skills (e.g., understanding media messages, analyzing and evaluating content) and practical skills (e.g., safe digital use, simple media production). Such a curriculum would not only prevent children from becoming passive media consumers but would also foster their development as active, critical, and creative media users.

Nonetheless, Iraq faces multiple challenges in this regard, including limited educational resources, shortage of qualified specialists, inadequate technological infrastructure in schools, and the broader socio-political context, which directly affects educational processes. Therefore, any curriculum design must be culturally and socially contextualized, aligned with the realities of Iraqi society. A well-structured curriculum can provide clear and feasible educational standards, respond to students' real needs, and optimize both content and teaching methods. Moreover, the identification of these components equips policymakers with evidence-based guidance for strengthening curriculum policies and aligning the educational system with contemporary demands.

The significance of this study lies in the multidimensional benefits of developing a coherent media literacy curriculum. First, it provides the foundation for a purposeful and effective curriculum capable of transmitting vital skills to children at an early stage. Second, it highlights the gaps in existing programs, offering opportunities for improvement and innovation in media literacy education. Third, it raises awareness among teachers, students, and parents, thereby fostering collective engagement in the educational process. Ultimately, a comprehensive and locally adapted curriculum has the potential to improve educational quality, contribute to Iraq's cultural and social development, and prepare a generation that is capable, critical, and technologically literate. Such a generation would be equipped to navigate the information society responsibly and to contribute actively to sustainable national development.

At the broader level, reinforcing media literacy during primary education helps shape a generation that is not only more resilient to the risks of misinformation, harmful media content, and manipulative advertising, but also more capable of leveraging digital technologies for learning, communication, and civic participation. In the Iraqi context, this requires overcoming barriers such as resource scarcity, uneven access to modern technologies, and cultural perceptions of media. Importantly, curriculum design must involve localization, taking into account Iraq's cultural, linguistic, and social diversity to ensure maximum relevance and effectiveness.

The findings also underscore the need for practical strategies: developing clear assessment standards, designing appropriate teacher training programs, providing ongoing evaluation tools, and integrating innovative educational technologies. These measures will enhance both teacher readiness and student engagement. Media literacy, in this sense, is not simply an academic subject but a life skill, essential for children to function responsibly within the complex media environment of the 21st century.

In conclusion, the development and articulation of media literacy curriculum components at the primary level in Iraq have broad implications for education, society, and culture. Such a curriculum would enable precise identification of children's learning needs, facilitate the creation of a coherent and context-sensitive program, and guide policymakers toward evidence-based curriculum design. Beyond addressing immediate educational concerns, this

initiative would enhance Iraq's capacity to equip future generations with critical, creative, and ethical competencies for active participation in the global information society.

Finally, it should be noted that the results of this study are limited to primary school students in Iraq, and caution should be exercised in generalizing the findings to other contexts. Future curriculum design efforts should incorporate cultural, linguistic, and social needs assessments prior to implementation, ensuring alignment with the lived realities of Iraqi children and families. Moreover, the effectiveness of such curricula should be evaluated through continuous and innovative assessment methods (e.g., simple questionnaires, practical activities), with systematic feedback loops for both students and teachers.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by ethics committee of Islamic Azad University.

Author contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design, material preparation, data collection and analysis. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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