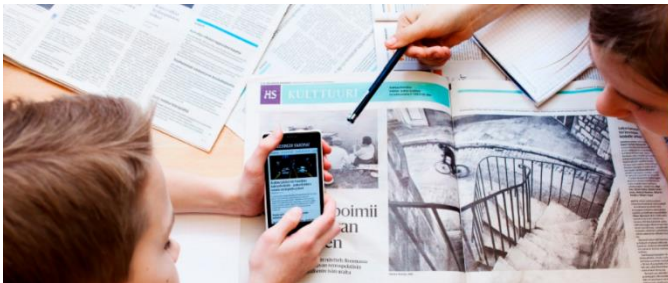


Media literacy education in Finland

By Audrey Quicke

Finland tops the media literacy index, an annual index of European countries measuring resistance to fake news. Finland's success rests on the teaching of media literacy skills in schools.



Source: mediataitokoulu¹

In the digital age, media literacy skills are increasingly important as 'fake news', the 24 hour news cycle and use of social media for news have increased the risk of digital exploitation. Media literacy is the 'ability to critically engage with media in all aspects of life'.² Media literacy skills include differentiating facts from opinion and analysis, verifying sources, and understanding how the media works.

Media literacy gained traction as an element of Finnish civic competence in the early 2010s. Following fake news campaigns focussing on immigration, the European Union, and NATO membership, the Finnish Government recognised the need to increase the population's resilience to digital misinformation. It instituted a cross-sector approach to improve media literacy within Finnish society, with a particular focus on children. According to the chief communications officer for the Finnish prime minister's office, "The first line of defence [against fake news] is the kindergarten teacher".³

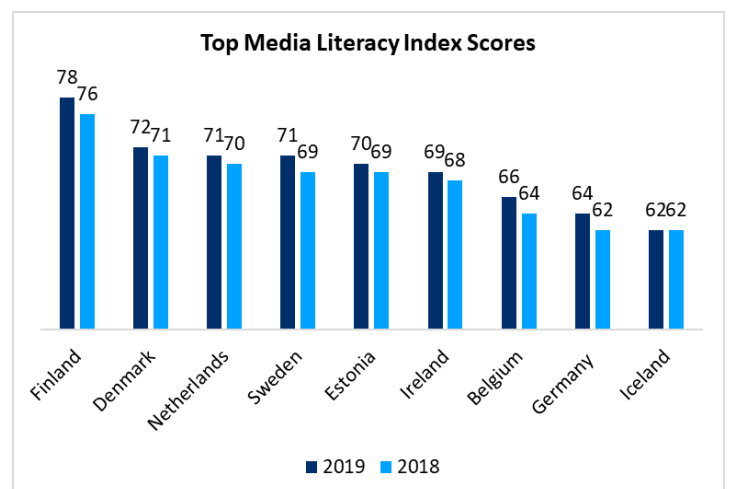
The Finnish national media education policy is implemented by the National Audio-visual Institute and the Ministry of Education and Culture in collaboration with media education professionals.⁴ The Department for Media Education and Audiovisual Media (MEKU) is legally tasked with promoting media education, youth media skills and fostering a safe media environment for children,⁵ while NGO-run fact-checking service, Faktabaari provides fact-checking and media literacy materials for schools.⁶

Media and digital literacy skills are embedded across Finland's national curriculum. Journalist Jon Henley describes how this plays out in practice; "In maths lessons ... pupils learn how easy it is to lie with statistics. In art, they see how an image's meaning can be manipulated. In history, they analyse notable propaganda campaigns, while Finnish language teachers work with them on the many ways in which words can be used to confuse, mislead and deceive."⁷

In Australia, research by Queensland University of Technology and Western Sydney University suggests that changes to the Australian curriculum are necessary to advance media literacy. Of 295 teachers surveyed, just 7% believe their school places a lot of importance on news/media education.⁸ Additionally, University of Tasmania research points to inconsistencies across educational sectors regarding the teaching of media literacy skills under the Australian Curriculum.⁹

The ACCC's 2019 Digital Platform Inquiry recommended news and media literacy be included within the 2020 scheduled review of the Australian Curriculum.¹⁰ A similar recommendation - that the Commonwealth work with the states and territories to improve the Australian Curriculum in regard to digital media literacy - was made in 2018 by the Senate Select Committee on the Future of Public Interest Journalism.¹¹

In responding to these recommendations and reviewing how media literacy is incorporated in the Australian Curriculum, the Finnish approach stands as an obvious example of success—prioritising children's media literacy skills, curbing the spread of misinformation and driving demand for credible information and journalism.



Source: Open Society Institute Sofia¹²

¹ Mediataitokoulu, https://www.mediataitokoulu.fi/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1139&Itemid=454&lang=fi

² Australian Media Literacy Alliance, <https://medialiteracy.org.au/>

³ CNN (2019) *Finland is winning the war on fake news. What it's learned may be crucial to Western democracy*, <https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2019/05/europe/finland-fake-news-intl/>

⁴ Ministry of Education and Culture (2019) *Media Literacy in Finland*, <https://medialukutaitosuomessa.fi/mediaeducationpolicy.pdf>

⁵ National Audiovisual institute Finland (2016) *Finnish Media Education: Promoting Media and Information Literacy in Finland*, p 3.

⁶ FaktaBaari, <https://faktabaari.fi/in-english/>

⁷ Henley (2020) *How Finland starts its fight against fake news in primary schools*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/28/fact-from-fiction-finlands-new-lessons-in-combating-fake-news>

⁸ Western Sydney university & QUT (2020) *News literacy and Australian Teachers: How news media is taught in the classroom*, <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2020-05/apo-nid306894.pdf>

⁹ University of Tasmania (2019) *Insight Five: A snapshot of Media Literacy in Australian Schools*, https://www.utas.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/1144409/Insight-Five-Media-Literacy.pdf

¹⁰ Australian Government (2019) *Regulating in the digital age: Government Response and Implementation Roadmap for the Digital Platforms inquiry*, Recommendation 13, <https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-12/Government-Response-p2019-41708.pdf>

¹¹ Senate Select Committee (2018) *Senate Select Committee on the Future of Public Interest Journalism*, Recommendation 3, https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Future_of_Public_Interest_Journalism/PublicInterestJournalism/Report

¹² OSIS (2019) *Media Literacy Index 2019*, <https://osis.bg/?p=3356&lang=en>

OSIS (2018) *Media Literacy Index 2018*, <https://osis.bg/?p=121&lang=en>
