INTEGRATING MEDIA AND INFORMATION LITERACY (MIL) IN OPEN AND DISTANCE eLEARNING (ODeL) IN THE PHILIPPINES: SOME POLICY AND ACTION AGENDA*

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Abstract

UNESCO's Media and Information Literacy (MIL) Curriculum and Competency Framework (2011) combines two distinct areas – media literacy and information literacy – under one umbrella term: media and information literacy. Media literacy "emphasizes the ability to understand media functions, evaluate how those functions are performed and to rationally engage with media for self-expression" (p. 18). On the other hand, information literacy "emphasizes the importance of access to information and the evaluation and ethical use of such information" (p. 18).

This curriculum and competency framework needs to be looked at, not only from the point of view of residential education, but also from the open and distance e-learning (ODeL) perspective. ODeL tutors, facilitators, and learners should understand the need to equip themselves with some skills in locating and evaluating sources, assessing information, selecting and developing appropriate learning materials and using tools and resources for facilitating and learning through ODeL. This will enable them to be more responsible, ethical users and creators of messages through the e-learning mode.

Some policy and action agenda on curriculum development, instructional design, materials production, course delivery and instruction, and student support services should therefore be seriously looked into to ensure a more creative, innovative, learner-centered ODeL system in the Philippines.

Sub-Theme: The State of the Art in ODeL
Keywords: media and information literacy, information literacy in e-learning

Introduction

Distance education has come of age in the Philippines. From broadcast-based school-on-the-air courses in the early 50's and 60's (Flor, 2011) to a more structured, school-based distance learning system to the present, distance education has evolved as a distinct discipline in the country. It has spawned the growth of more innovative alternative learning strategies from print-based to multi-media based, from classroom-based to blended mode, and from equivalency and accreditation to e-learning. There are now 26 tertiary schools in the Philippines that offer distance education courses (Flor, 2011) in different modes, sometimes both print and electronic. Likewise, e-learning as a form of course delivery is also used in the residential schools at certain times to entice and engage today's learners -- the digital natives.

With the advent of computers, multimedia and Internet, educators and school administrators are now encouraged and challenged to develop strategies to maximize the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in education. This is well-articulated in the Long-Term Higher Education Development Plan of Commission on Higher Education, the Philippines' government body in higher education. To wit:

> "ICTs have reshaped the educational landscape by transforming the content and modes of delivery/acquisition of learning as well as how the educational institutions operate. For teachers and institutions, the World Wide Web (WWW) promises access to enormous amounts of information and new

systems of communication, management and learning. Education technologies offered by computers, CD-ROMs, video tapes, satellites, and various audio-visual equipment complement, supplement and strengthen the traditional print educational materials and methods" (LTHEDP, 2001, pp. 1-2).

However, the emergence of media and Internet culture does have its own drawbacks such as the "cut and paste" mentality which allows learners to copy information from proprietary sources without proper attribution. This also makes lurkers to passively accept anything from the Internet as legitimate. Learners get exposed as well to objectionable, disturbing or inappropriate materials on the Internet. Sometimes, they also upload information and messages on the Internet irresponsibly without thinking of the repercussions of their actions.

Will Richardson (2006) of Hunterdon Central Regional High School in Flemington, New Jersey said, "teachers must consider whether our curriculums should change now that students have the ability to reach audiences far beyond our classroom walls and to acquire their own primary sources." He adds that we need to rethink our concept of literacy beyond the ability to read and write, to wit:

> …Now that anyone with an Internet connection can publish and disseminate content with no editorial review process, consumers of Web content need to be editors as well as readers. They need to know how to identify the source of a piece of information, gauge the source's reputation, compare the information with what's already known, and make a judgment about its authenticity and relevance. We must teach students how to actively question and evaluate published information…

It is therefore necessary to review how higher education system in general and open and distance e-learning (ODeL) in particular provide learners the skills needed to make them more media and information literates in the digital age.

UNESCO's Media and Information Literacy Program

UNESCO (2008) defines media and information literacy (MIL) as "knowledge and understanding of how the media operate, how they construct meaning, how they can be used, and how to evaluate the information they present. This also implies knowledge and understanding of personal and social values, responsibilities relating to the ethical use of technology and information, as well as participation in democratic and cultural dialogue."

Media literacy "emphasizes the ability to understand media functions, evaluate how those functions are performed and to rationally engage with media for self-expression" (p. 18). On the other hand, information literacy "emphasizes the importance of access to information and the evaluation and ethical use of such information" (p.18).

UNESCO (2011) has identified the key outcomes and elements of media and information literacy. Media literacy includes how to:

- Understand the role and functions of media in democratic societies
- Understand the conditions under which media can fulfill their functions
- Critically evaluate media content in the light of media functions
- Engage with media for self-expression and democratic participation
- Review skills (including ICTs) needed to produce user-generated content
- Define and articulate information needs

On the other hand, information literacy includes how to:

- Locate and access information

- Assess information

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- Organize information

- Make ethical use of information

- Communicate information

- Use ICT skills for information processing

Hobbs (2010) also introduced the concept of digital and media literacy which is related to UNESCO's media and information literacy. She said that digital and media literacy "is used to encompass the full range of cognitive, emotional and social competencies that includes the use of texts, tools and technologies; the skills of critical thinking and analysis; the practice of message composition and creativity; the ability to engage in reflection and ethical thinking; as well as active participation through teamwork and collaboration. When people have digital and media literacy competencies, they recognize personal, corporate and political agendas and are empowered to speak out on behalf of the missing voices and omitted perspectives in our communities. By identifying and attempting to solve problems, people use their powerful voices and their rights under the law to improve the world around them" (p. 17).

This is the reason why media and information literacy is needed not only to protect ourselves from the harmful effects of media and Internet but also to empower us to make wise choices about media and information that are useful to our everyday lives and our ability to communicate and participate in discussions that directly affect us.

How then are these issues and concerns integrated in open and distance e-learning? What do CHED guidelines say about media and information literacy?

The Philippines' Open and Distance Learning Policy

The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) through its Technical Committee for Distance Education has developed CHED Memorandum Order #27, series 2005 entitled "Policies and Guidelines on Distance Education" to provide guidelines in the management of distance education programs at the tertiary level. The memorandum order includes the implementing guidelines on qualifications of higher education institutions to offer distance education programs, institutional management and commitment, and components of distance education such as curriculum and delivery system, instructional materials development, delivery mode/strategies and student support services.

Distance education, as defined in this memorandum order, refers to "a mode of educational delivery whereby teacher and learner are separated in time and space, and instruction is delivered through specially designed materials and methods using appropriate technologies and supported by organizational and administrative structures and arrangements" (CHED, 2005).

Since the memorandum order is generic, the concept of e-learning is not so much explored. This is just a part of course delivery. It does not tell exactly how e-learning should be designed, used and managed in distance education. It does not also specifically mention the concept of open learning but implied in certain provisions. All the more, it is not expected to carry the concept of MIL as this is supposed to be discretionary on the part of distance education institution in the way programs should be designed.

E-learning is a subset of distance education. It is not what distance education is all about. However, since Internet and other modern technologies are becoming readily available, e-learning could be covered extensively in the Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) of the memorandum order. How to access, evaluate and use instructional materials by, with and through the media and Internet should likewise be properly addressed. Distance education tutors and facilitators now deal with learners who spend most of their time using media and Internet and producing materials using digital tools. Open learning as a philosophy of learning and the amount of flexibility needed should likewise be covered in the IRR. The media and information

literacy requirements may be subsumed by the components of IRR on instructional materials development and student support services.

Areas for Integrating Media and Information Literacy in ODeL

Three key interrelated thematic areas (UNESCO, 2011) guided the development of MIL curriculum as follows:

1. Knowledge and understanding of media and information for democratic discourse and social participation;
2. Evaluation of media texts and information sources; and
3. Production and use of media and information.

The first thematic area aims to "develop a critical understanding of how media and information can enhance the ability of teachers, students and citizens in general to engage with media and use libraries, archives and other information providers as tools for freedom of information, pluralism, intercultural dialogue and tolerance, and as contributors to democratic debate and good governance" (p. 25). The second thematic area focuses on how to "increase the capacity of teachers to evaluate sources and assess information based on particular public service functions normally attributed to media, libraries, archives and other information providers" (p. 27). Finally, the third thematic area dwells on the teachers' ability "to select, adapt, and/or develop media and information literacy materials and tools for a given set of instructional objectives and student learning needs… In addition, teachers should develop skills in helping students apply these tools and resources in their learning, especially in relation to enquiry and problem-solving" (p. 28).

Let us now explore how we can use these thematic areas in open and distance e-learning in the Philippines. The following are suggested strategies in integrating MIL in course design, development and management of e-learning programs:

MIL Thematic Areas	Some ODeL Action Strategies
Knowledge and understanding of media and information for democratic discourse and social participation	Provide guidelines in locating media and information sources with emphasis on how to achieve cyber wellness and Internet safety without prejudice to discovery-based learning and bricolage reasoning Develop guidelines on online activities that will allow them to use and review podcasts, webinars, blogs, wikis, videos, music, among others, and explain how and why messages in these media or platforms are created and produced in informing, entertaining or persuading learners and tutors Provide guidelines on how search engines work Organize teams online for class project coordination, implementation and management
Evaluation of media texts and information sources	Provide guidelines on how to assess the value, authenticity, validity and reliability of media and Internet information and materials Introduce activities in the modules that will allow learners to understand, analyze and think critically about issues covered by media and

	Internet
Production and use of media and information	Use digital tools to communicate, collaborate, mobilize groups to tutor and facilitate courses more coherently and responsibly; accomplish, produce and evaluate course requirements; and manage interaction and feedback more deliberately. Provide activities in the modules that will enable learners to sharpen their research skills, organize information gained from media and Internet, and communicate what they have learned through media outputs and projects.

Some Policy and Action Agenda

What are some of the policy and action agenda that can be integrated in a new set of guidelines on open and distance learning to address MIL concerns? This author reviews the components of CHED memorandum order and suggests the following:

Definition of Terms. Include all terms related to open and distance learning such as open learning, open educational resources, open calendar, e-learning, online learning, resource-based learning, instructional design, among others.

Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions to Offer Distance Education Programs. A provision for stand-alone distance education institutions which would like to offer new distance education programs should be included. The present guidelines require accreditation of programs in the residential mode before such could be allowed to offer an equivalent program via distance mode. At present, there is no accrediting body for distance education programs.

Curriculum and Delivery System. Curriculum development for open and distance learning must always be based on competency mapping to identify the content, structure, and sequencing of courses. Since learner-centeredness is highlighted in the Guiding Principles, curriculum should be based on analysis of learners' needs and competencies. This is also a requirement for Outcome-Based Education Program of CHED. Media and information literacy competencies should likewise be included in the analysis to determine the learners' readiness to take courses online, level of digital literacy and fluency and information navigation skills. These competencies will also be the basis for developing the instructional design of courses and study guides. The Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) will discuss how competency mapping can be done for the different programs.

Instructional Materials Development. Design of distance education modules should be handled by an instructional designer who is knowledgeable in distance-based instructional systems development. MIL should be part of the design, especially for the instructional strategies and activities to produce learners who are more engaged in, creative and critical users and creators of course requirements through media and Internet. After all, media and Internet are the sources of information and knowledge in open and distance learning. Therefore, design should include locating, analyzing, evaluating, using, producing and communicating information.

Delivery Mode/Strategies. The IRR should include guidelines on the use of e-learning as a delivery mode. They should include provisions on the design, development, implementation and evaluation of e-learning and m-learning programs. This will ensure appropriate and effective management of programs related to blended learning, interactivity of courses, use of social media, locating and evaluating sources for resource-based learning, among others.

  Student Support Services. The IRR should include the collaboration among subject matter specialists, librarians, and technical staff in providing learner support for accessing and organizing information resources. This will encourage self-direction to achieve the learner's educational and personal goals. An orientation on the management and use of these resources online should also be provided.

Conclusion

  Media and information literacy enables learners, tutors, facilitators and administrators to be more responsible and ethical in the conduct and management of distance learning programs. It is our passport to lifelong learning. Whatever we do now with media and Internet will surely reflect how we use and manage information in our daily lives. Let us then learn how to locate, evaluate, use, produce, and communicate information properly to achieve a meaningful life that we all deserve.

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