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Perspective

Beyond information literacy: Why metaliteracy is crucial for modern health education programs

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Abstract
Metaliteracy is a critical skill that enables individuals to evaluate information for bias, accuracy, and truthfulness, and construct knowledge. The paper argues that metaliteracy is essential in modern health education, and not only information literacy. Metaliteracy enables health educators to critically appraise health information thereby promoting accurate knowledge dissemination. It also enhances the core skills of health educators by allowing them to maneuver through the "infodemic," debunking misinformation and creating usable health advices. By embracing metaliteracy, health education may protect public health and elevates its professional standing.
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Introduction

Metaliteracy is a critical skill that enables individuals to evaluate information for bias, accuracy, and truthfulness, and construct knowledge.[1] It is beneficial in navigating the internet and social interactions, where information can be fluid and subjective. Metaliteracy integrates critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and digital competencies such as information fluency and media literacy. It empowers individuals to participate actively in the global information society by effectively navigating complex digital environments. Metaliteracy expands on traditional information literacy, emphasizing the ability to critically evaluate, produce, and share information in collaborative online environments. Key aspects include:

- Informed characteristic: Metaliterate learners critically evaluate information sources' authority, reliability, and credibility.[2] This requires a reflective, nuanced process rather than a straightforward skills-based approach.
- Collaborative characteristic: They engage in partnerships and knowledge communities that include diverse perspectives.[3] Collaboration is a key feature of metaliteracy.
- Metacognitive domain: Metaliteracy emphasizes metacognitive reflection, empowering learners to adapt to changes in emerging technologies.[4] This empowers learners to adapt to ongoing changes in emerging technologies.
- Comprehensive framework: It integrates information literacy with other literacies like digital, media, and visual literacy.[2]

It appears that metaliteracy offers a comprehensive approach to preparing learners for effectively producing and sharing knowledge in the digital age, going beyond traditional skills-based information literacy. However, the question remains about how a health educator can benefit from developing their metaliteracy skills. To address this concern, it is beneficial to reconsider two key concepts: the definition of "Health Education" and the core competencies of a health educator.

Health education is a discipline that seeks to inform individuals about various aspects of health, including environmental, physical, social, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, as well as sexual and reproductive health education. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health education as a combination of learning experiences designed to assist individuals and communities in improving their health, by enhancing their knowledge or influencing their attitudes. It is a process that not only informs but also motivates individuals to adopt and maintain healthy practices and lifestyles. In alignment with this, health educators, according to the National Commission for Health Education Credentialing (NCHEC),[5] require multifaceted skills that include assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation. This skill is crucial in their pivotal role within the health system. Their responsibilities include identifying health needs within a target population, designing and delivering educational programs, and measuring the effectiveness of those interventions. They also help individuals manage

existing health conditions and develop and facilitate workshops and programs to address the health needs of patients.

In addition to these tasks, health educators must possess strong communication skills to disseminate complex health information clearly and understandably.[6] Other necessary skills include problem-solving, critical thinking, cultural and diversity awareness, patience and empathy, public speaking, teaching, and time management. The WHO emphasizes that a competent health educator should have the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to adopt new approaches in planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating health education programs.[7] These competencies enable health educators to effectively contribute to the attainment of high-quality education and the production of effective, efficient, and skilled nurses who can respond to the health needs of the populations they serve.

The simplicity fallacy in health education

On the surface, health education might appear conceptually straightforward with well-defined competencies. One might assume, incorrectly, that these competencies are easily mastered by anyone with some health knowledge. This assumption is further reinforced by the belief that a health educator, presumably possessing superior health knowledge, should be well-equipped for the role. This perspective, however, overlooks a critical skill: metaliteracy.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the limitations of relying solely on health literacy in health education. The "infodemic" phenomenon highlighted that a background in medical science and knowledge of health issues are insufficient to combat the spread of misinformation and rumors. During this crisis, the need for a more nuanced skillset became readily apparent.

Metaliteracy: The essential complement to health literacy

Beyond health literacy, health education specialists require metaliteracy – the ability to critically evaluate information. This skill empowers them to navigate the vast ocean of health data, discerning truth from falsehood. Metaliteracy equips educators to screen and critique information, ultimately providing their audience with the most accurate and relevant health knowledge.

Conclusion and Suggestions

In a complex world of information, embracing metaliteracy can help health educators. This raises health education to a professional level thereby preventing unqualified individuals from entering the field and also preserving public health by enabling educators to:

- Think critically about information with respect to prejudice, accuracy, and validity so that they offer the most precise and beneficial recommendations to their audience.
- Create generalizable health advice for the public by putting together new knowledge from complicated health information.
- Developing strategies for dealing with misinformation is vital in today's world which has many rumors about people's wellbeing.
- Learning as a lifelong process should be incorporated in one's life in order to remain up-to-date about current research findings and advances in healthcare sector.

With the adoption of metaliteracy, the field of Health Education can ensure that correct and timely information about health reaches people leading to an improved overall well-being among population.

Competing Interests

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Ethical Approval

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