

Navigating the Transition from Access to Competence: Practices and Barriers in Philippine Media and Information Literacy Programs

**Riza P. Namoro¹, Mary Grace A. Bautista², Jeremiah B. Garcia³,
Shiela B. Gollos⁴, Belen N. Villaluz⁵, Dr. Myla Bermat⁶**

¹Librarian, University of Northeastern Philippines, University of Perpetual Help System Laguna, Philippines

^{2,4}Library Assistant, Quezon City Public Library, University of Perpetual Help System Laguna, Philippines

³Librarian II, Quezon City Public Library, University of Perpetual Help System Laguna, Philippines

⁵Library Staff, University of Northeastern Philippines, University of Perpetual Help System Laguna, Philippines

⁶Professor, University of Perpetual Help System Laguna, Philippines

Abstract

This study examined the implementation, barriers, and perceived effectiveness of Media and Information Literacy (MIL) programs in selected public and academic libraries in the Philippines, focusing on the transition from information access to user competence. Despite increasing recognition of MIL as an essential competency in digital environments, limited empirical evidence exists regarding its implementation within Philippine libraries. Using an exploratory descriptive mixed-methods design, the study collected quantitative and qualitative data from 40 librarians, library staff, and library users through a structured questionnaire and an open-ended survey. Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were used to analyze the data. Findings showed that library orientations, workshops and training sessions, and digital learning activities were the most common MIL initiatives. However, implementation was constrained by limited resources, uneven participation, limited integration of emerging digital issues such as misinformation and artificial intelligence, and insufficient time and manpower. Participants generally reported moderate levels of competence across Media and Information Literacy domains, with relatively higher scores in information evaluation and critical thinking than in foundational information skills. Qualitative findings emphasized the need for interactive instructional strategies, continuous librarian capacity-building, stronger institutional support, and the inclusion of contemporary digital issues in MIL instruction. The findings suggest that while library-based MIL programs contribute to developing user competencies, strengthening instructional approaches and institutional support is essential to advance higher-order digital literacy and critical thinking skills.

Keywords: Media and Information Literacy, library practices, user competence, Philippine libraries, Acc-

ess–Competence Gap

1. Introduction

Media and Information Literacy (MIL) has become an essential competency in the digital era, where individuals encounter large volumes of information through social media platforms, search engines, and artificial intelligence technologies. Although access to digital information has expanded considerably, many users still encounter difficulties in evaluating information critically and applying it responsibly. This imbalance between information access and the development of higher-order competencies has been described as the Access–Competence Gap [1]. Differences in users' internet skills and information practices also demonstrate that access to digital technologies does not automatically result in equal levels of digital competence [2]. The rapid spread of misinformation, disinformation, and manipulated digital content further emphasizes the need for users to develop critical evaluation, verification, and ethical information-use skills [3].

Advances in algorithm-driven platforms and artificial intelligence have also transformed the way information is produced, distributed, and consumed. These technologies influence the visibility and credibility of online information, making it increasingly difficult for users to distinguish reliable sources from misleading content [4]. Digital literacy therefore requires not only access to technology but also the skills needed to evaluate and use digital information responsibly [5]. Consequently, Media and Information Literacy programs must extend beyond providing access to information and instead cultivate critical thinking, responsible information practices, and informed decision-making in digital environments.

Media and Information Literacy has been widely recognized as a framework that enables individuals to access, evaluate, create, and use information effectively and ethically [6]. Libraries have an important role in promoting these competencies through user education programs, orientations, workshops, and digital learning activities that strengthen information evaluation skills and responsible media engagement [7,5]. In the Philippines, Media and Information Literacy has been incorporated into the K–12 curriculum and is increasingly supported through library-based educational initiatives, including orientations, instructional workshops, and digital learning activities [8]. Although numerous studies have examined Media and Information Literacy frameworks and educational outcomes, relatively few have investigated how these programs are implemented within Philippine public and academic libraries. Existing research has largely focused on classroom settings or theoretical discussions, leaving limited empirical evidence regarding implementation practices, institutional barriers, and their contribution to developing user competence in library environments.

Furthermore, only a limited number of Philippine studies have examined Media and Information Literacy implementation, institutional challenges, users' competency development, and strategies for program improvement within both public and academic libraries. Examining these dimensions together provides a more comprehensive understanding of how library-based initiatives can facilitate the transition from information access to higher-order competencies. Recent studies also indicate that many Media and Information Literacy programs continue to emphasize foundational skills while giving less attention to emerging issues such as artificial intelligence, misinformation, algorithmic bias, and digital ethics [7,9,10]. These gaps highlight the need for empirical evidence that can guide improvements in library-based Media and Information Literacy programs within the Philippine context.

To address these research gaps, the present study investigates the implementation practices, barriers, and perceived effectiveness of Media and Information Literacy programs in selected public and academic libraries in the Philippines. Specifically, it examines how these programs are implemented, identifies the challenges affecting their delivery and sustainability, evaluates their contribution to the development of user competence, and explores strategies that may strengthen future Media and Information Literacy initiatives.

Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How are Media and Information Literacy (MIL) programs implemented and delivered in your library, and what core competencies do they aim to develop among users?
2. How do users engage with and respond to MIL activities, and what factors influence their level of participation?
3. What challenges and resource constraints affect the implementation and sustainability of MIL programs in your institution?
4. In what ways do contemporary issues such as misinformation, fake news, and AI-generated content shape your approach to MIL instruction?
5. How do participants perceive the contribution of Media and Information Literacy (MIL) programs to the development of users' information evaluation and critical thinking skills, and what strategies could further strengthen these programs?

2. Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Media and Information Literacy framework of UNESCO [6] and the concept of the Access–Competence Gap [1]. According to UNESCO [6], MIL involves access, evaluation, and creation of information, emphasizing critical engagement with media content. However, the persistence of misinformation [3] and algorithm-driven content systems [4] complicates users' ability to evaluate information critically. As a result, there remains a gap between information access and competence development [1].

Library-based MIL programs such as orientations and workshops primarily address access-level skills [7,9], but are less effective in developing advanced evaluation and critical thinking skills. Differences in internet skills among users [2] and the broader relationship between information literacy, library engagement, and academic performance [11] further demonstrate the importance of strengthening users' higher-order competencies.

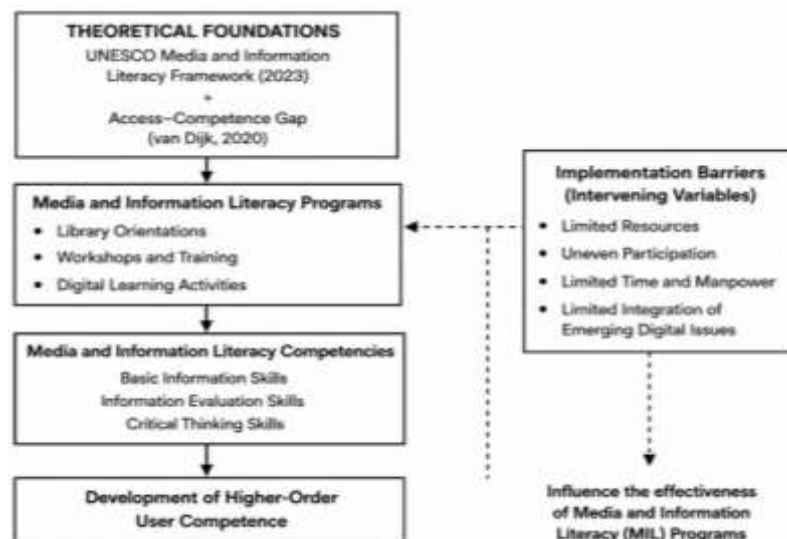
In the context of this study, the theoretical framework integrates these perspectives to explain how MIL programs function within libraries. Library-based Media and Information Literacy programs such as orientations, workshops, and digital learning activities are expected to strengthen users' ability to access, evaluate, and responsibly use information. The framework also recognizes that competence development is influenced by users' digital skills [2], the quality of library engagement [11], and the evolving demands of digital information environments [6,10].

Based on UNESCO's Media and Information Literacy Framework [6] and the concept of the Access–Competence Gap proposed by van Dijk [1], the present study proposes that library-based Media and Information Literacy programs can contribute to the development of users' information literacy competencies. Their effectiveness is influenced by implementation barriers such as limited resources,

uneven participation, limited time and manpower, and inadequate integration of emerging digital issues. These barriers may restrict the transition from basic information access to advanced evaluation and critical thinking [12,10].

Furthermore, the framework incorporates key implementation barriers identified in the study, namely limited resources, uneven participation, limited time and manpower, and lack of integration of emerging digital issues. These barriers act as intervening variables that influence the effectiveness of MIL programs in achieving higher levels of competence.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study



The framework illustrates that Media and Information Literacy (MIL) programs, grounded in the UNESCO Media and Information Literacy Framework [6] and the Access-Competence Gap Theory [1], contribute to the development of users' information literacy competencies. The effectiveness of these programs is influenced by implementation barriers such as limited resources, uneven participation, limited time and manpower, and inadequate integration of emerging digital issues. The framework also recognizes the role of digital literacy [5], internet skills [2], library engagement [11], and evolving media and digital competence requirements [10] in shaping users' learning outcomes.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed an exploratory descriptive mixed-methods research design to examine the implementation practices, barriers, and perceived Media and Information Literacy (MIL) competencies in selected public and academic libraries in the Philippines. The mixed-methods approach integrated quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of MIL program implementation, consistent with established discussions of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods research design [13,14]. Quantitative data were used to determine trends in implementation practices, barriers, and competency levels, while qualitative data provided insights into participants' experiences and recommendations for program improvement.

a. Participants and Sampling Procedure

The study involved 40 respondents from selected public and academic libraries in the Philippines. The

participants consisted of librarians, library staff, and library users who had direct experience with Media and Information Literacy programs. Twenty respondents were drawn from public libraries and twenty from academic libraries.

Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that all participants had sufficient exposure to Media and Information Literacy activities. This sampling technique enabled the researchers to gather relevant information directly related to the objectives of the study.

b. Research Instrument

The primary data-gathering instrument used in this study was a self-developed survey questionnaire designed based on the objectives of the study and relevant literature on Media and Information Literacy (MIL). The instrument was anchored on the UNESCO Media and Information Literacy Framework (2023) [6], the Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education [15], and related studies on information literacy and digital competence [9,10].

The questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first section collected the demographic profile of the respondents. The second section measured Media and Information Literacy practices, implementation barriers, and perceived competency levels using a five-point Likert scale. The third section contained an open-ended question that solicited participants' recommendations for strengthening Media and Information Literacy programs.

To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by experts in Library and Information Science and educational research. Revisions were incorporated to improve the clarity, relevance, organization, and consistency of the questionnaire items.

Participants' perceived Media and Information Literacy competencies were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Very Low Perceived Competence) to 5 (Very High Perceived Competence). The scale assessed competencies related to identifying credible sources, verifying information, distinguishing fact from opinion, detecting misinformation, cross-checking information, and the ethical use of information.

The interpretation of mean scores was based on equal interval classification. The interval width was computed using the following equation:

$$\begin{aligned}\text{Interval Width} &= (\text{Highest Scale Value} - \text{Lowest Scale Value}) \div \text{Number of Scale Categories} \\ &= (5 - 1) \div 5 \\ &= 0.80\end{aligned}$$

Based on the computed interval width, the following descriptive ranges were used: 4.21–5.00 (Very High Perceived Competence), 3.41–4.20 (Moderate Perceived Competence), 2.61–3.40 (Fair Perceived Competence), 1.81–2.60 (Low Perceived Competence), and 1.00–1.80 (Very Low Perceived Competence). Mean scores for each competency domain were interpreted using these descriptive categories.

c. Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted through an online survey platform. Participants were informed of the objectives of the study and voluntarily agreed to participate. Ethical considerations were observed throughout the research process. Informed consent was secured, confidentiality was maintained, and no personally identifiable information was collected.

d. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Frequencies and percentages were used to summarize demographic characteristics, implementation practi-

ces, and barriers. Mean scores were used to determine perceived competency levels.

The interpretation of mean scores followed the five-point Likert scale classification: 4.21–5.00 (Very High), 3.41–4.20 (Moderate), 2.61–3.40 (Fair), 1.81–2.60 (Low), and 1.00–1.80 (Very Low).

Qualitative responses were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke’s six-phase framework [16]. Responses were coded, categorized, and grouped into recurring themes. Quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated during interpretation to provide a comprehensive understanding of MIL implementation in Philippine libraries.

4. Results

This section presents the key findings of the study on Media and Information Literacy (MIL) programs in selected public and academic libraries in the Philippines. It highlights the profile of respondents, the implementation of MIL practices, the barriers encountered, and the perceived effectiveness of these programs in developing user competence. The analysis is based on aggregated responses from librarians, staff, and users (n = 40), providing an overall perspective on MIL practices and challenges across both library settings.

Table 1 Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Profile	Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	18–23 years old	12	30.0
	24–30 years old	10	25.0
	31–40 years old	10	25.0
	41 years and above	8	20.0
	Total	40	100.0
Gender	Male	12	30.0
	Female	28	70.0
	Total	40	100.0
Educational Attainment	High School Graduate	6	15.0
	Bachelor’s Degree	22	55.0
	Master’s Degree	10	25.0
	Doctorate Degree	2	5.0
	Total	40	100.0

Type of Library	Public Library	20	50.0
	Academic Library	20	50.0
	Total	40	100.0
Role	Librarians/Staff	20	50.0
	Users	20	50.0
	Total	40	100.0

Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the 40 participants from selected public and academic libraries in the Philippines who took part in the study. The information provides a necessary background for interpreting the responses related to Media and Information Literacy (MIL) program practices, barriers, and effectiveness.

In terms of age, the largest group of respondents (30.0%) falls within the 18–23 years old category, followed by respondents aged 24–30 years old and 31–40 years old, each representing 25.0% of the sample. Participants aged 41 years and above account for 20.0%. This distribution indicates a relatively balanced representation of younger and middle-aged individuals, which is significant as exposure to digital environments and information practices may vary across age groups.

In terms of gender, the sample consisted of 28 females (70.0%) and 12 males (30.0%), indicating a female-dominated group of respondents. This reflects common trends in both library user populations and library workforce composition, which may influence engagement and participation in MIL programs.

Regarding educational attainment, the majority of respondents are bachelor's degree holders (55.0%), followed by those with master's degrees (25%). A smaller proportion consists of high school graduates (15.0%) and doctorate degree holders (5.0%). This profile suggests that most participants have formal academic training, which may influence their ability to engage with and benefit from Media and Information Literacy programs.

In terms of institutional affiliation, respondents are equally distributed between public libraries (50.0%) and academic libraries (50.0%), ensuring balanced representation from both community-based and educational library settings. Similarly, participants are evenly divided between librarians/staff (50.0%) and users (50.0%), allowing the study to capture both implementation perspectives and user experiences. Overall, the demographic distribution reflects a diverse group of respondents in terms of age, gender, educational attainment, and library affiliation. This diversity provides a strong foundation for analyzing how Media and Information Literacy (MIL) programs are implemented and how they contribute to the development of user competence across different library environments.

Table 2 Summary of Media and Information Literacy (MIL) Practices

MIL Practice	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Library Orientations	35	87.5
Workshops/Training	30	75.0

Digital Learning Activities	25	62.5
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Table 2 presents the Media and Information Literacy (MIL) practices commonly implemented in selected public and academic libraries. Among the identified activities, library orientations emerged as the most frequently conducted practice, with 35 respondents (87.5%) indicating participation or exposure. This suggests that orientations serve as the primary entry point for introducing users to information literacy concepts, library resources, and responsible information use.

Workshops and training sessions were also widely implemented, with 30 respondents (75.0%) reporting participation. These activities typically focus on developing users' research skills, information evaluation abilities, and awareness of digital tools. The high frequency of workshops indicates that libraries actively provide structured learning opportunities beyond basic orientation.

Meanwhile, digital learning activities were reported by 25 respondents (62.5%), making them moderately implemented compared to other practices. This suggests that while libraries are integrating technology-based learning approaches, such initiatives are not yet consistently applied across all institutions.

Overall, the findings indicate that MIL programs in libraries are strongly grounded in traditional instructional approaches, particularly orientations and workshops. However, the relatively lower implementation of digital learning activities highlights a need for further integration of technology-driven and interactive learning strategies to enhance user competence in increasingly complex digital information environments.

Table 3
Barriers in Media and Information Literacy (MIL) Program Implementation

Barrier	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Limited Resources	32	80.0
Uneven Participation	28	70.0
Lack of Emerging Content (AI, misinformation)	27	67.5
Limited Time/Manpower	25	62.5

Table 3 presents the key barriers encountered in the implementation of Media and Information Literacy (MIL) programs in selected public and academic libraries. Among the identified challenges, limited resources emerged as the most significant barrier, reported by 32 respondents (80.0%). This indicates that constraints in funding, technological infrastructure, and instructional materials greatly affect the delivery and sustainability of MIL programs.

Uneven participation was also identified as a major challenge, with 28 respondents (70.0%) reporting inconsistent attendance and engagement among users. This suggests that while MIL programs are available, not all target participants are actively involved, which may limit the overall impact of these initiatives.

Additionally, the lack of integration of emerging digital content, such as misinformation, artificial intelligence, and algorithmic bias, was reported by 27 respondents (67.5%). This highlights a gap in program content, indicating that current MIL programs may not fully address the evolving nature of the digital information environment.

Lastly, limited time and manpower (62.5%) was also identified as a constraint, as librarians and staff often manage multiple responsibilities, reducing their capacity to plan and implement comprehensive MIL programs.

Overall, the findings suggest that both institutional constraints (resources and manpower) and instructional limitations (content and participation) significantly affect the effectiveness of MIL programs. Addressing these barriers is essential in strengthening the role of libraries in developing user competence in the digital age.

Table 4
Perceived Media and Information Literacy Competencies

Competency Domain	Number of Indicators	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Basic Information Skills	6	3.46	1.47	Moderate Perceived Competence
Information Evaluation Skills	2	3.72	1.50	Moderate Perceived Competence
Critical Thinking Skills	2	3.64	1.49	Moderate Perceived Competence

Note. Mean scores are based on participants' self-reported perceptions using a five-point Likert scale. Although all competency domains were interpreted as exhibiting moderate perceived competence, slight differences in mean scores indicate relatively stronger perceptions in information evaluation and critical thinking than in foundational information skills.

Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics of participants' perceived Media and Information Literacy (MIL) competencies. Overall, respondents reported moderate perceived competence across the three major competency domains. Information Evaluation Skills obtained the highest mean score ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 1.50$), followed by Critical Thinking Skills ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 1.49$). Basic Information Skills recorded a mean score of 3.46 ($SD = 1.47$). Although all competency domains fall within the same descriptive category of moderate perceived competence, the findings suggest slight variations in participants' perceptions.

Specifically, respondents reported relatively stronger confidence in information evaluation and critical thinking than in foundational information skills. These findings indicate that participants generally perceived themselves as moderately competent across all aspects of Media and Information Literacy, while also suggesting opportunities for further strengthening competencies across all domains.

Table 5.
Suggested Strategies for Strengthening MIL Programs

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Intended Outcome
Interactive Teaching Methods	30	75.0	Enhances engagement and practical skill application
Integration of Digital Issues (AI, misinformation)	28	70.0	Improves critical awareness of digital environments
Librarian Training	26	65.0	Strengthens instructional delivery and program quality
Increased Institutional Support	25	62.5	Ensures sustainability and resource availability

Table 5 presents the strategies recommended by participants to strengthen the implementation of Media and Information Literacy (MIL) programs. The most frequently identified strategy is the use of interactive teaching methods (75.0%), emphasizing the need for participatory and hands-on learning approaches. This is followed by the integration of digital issues such as misinformation and artificial intelligence (70.0%), highlighting the importance of aligning program content with current digital challenges. Librarian training (65.0%) and increased institutional support (62.5%) were also identified as essential factors in improving program delivery and sustainability. These findings suggest that strengthening MIL programs requires not only improved instructional strategies but also systemic and institutional support mechanisms.

5. Qualitative Findings

To complement the quantitative findings, the responses to the open-ended question on suggested improvements for Media and Information Literacy (MIL) programs were analyzed using thematic analysis. The responses were reviewed, coded, and grouped into recurring themes that reflected participants' recommendations for strengthening MIL implementation in public and academic libraries.

5.1 Continuous and Regular Implementation of MIL Programs

A recurring recommendation among participants was the need to conduct Media and Information Literacy programs on a regular and continuous basis. Respondents emphasized that seminars, workshops, and training sessions should be offered more frequently to reinforce users' information literacy competencies and ensure that learning is sustained over time. Representative responses included "Conduct more seminars regularly," "Offer continuous training," and "Hold workshops every quarter."

5.2. Interactive and Practical Learning Approaches

Participants suggested that MIL programs should adopt more interactive and hands-on instructional strategies rather than relying primarily on lecture-based discussions. Respondents recommended practical activities such as fact-checking exercises, media analysis, guided online research, and collaborative learning activities to strengthen users' critical thinking and information evaluation skills. Representative responses included "Provide more hands-on activities," "Include practical exercises," and "Make workshops more interactive."

5.3 Integration of Emerging Digital Issues

Another recurring recommendation was the inclusion of contemporary digital topics such as artificial intelligence, misinformation, fake news, algorithmic bias, and digital ethics. Participants believed that MIL programs should continuously update their content to address current digital challenges and prepare users to navigate complex online information environments. Representative responses included "Include AI and fake news topics," "Teach digital ethics," and "Discuss misinformation and fact-checking."

5.4 Strengthening Institutional Support and Community Engagement

Participants also emphasized the importance of stronger institutional support to improve the implementation and sustainability of MIL programs. Suggestions included increasing funding, improving technological resources, strengthening partnerships with educational institutions and community organizations, expanding public awareness campaigns, and providing continuous professional development opportunities for librarians. Representative responses included "Increase funding for programs," "Strengthen partnerships," "Promote MIL through social media," and "Provide more training for librarians."

Overall, the qualitative findings reinforce the quantitative results presented in Table 5, particularly the importance of interactive teaching methods, the integration of emerging digital issues, librarian capacity building, and increased institutional support. These findings indicate that strengthening Media and Information Literacy programs requires both instructional innovation and sustained organizational commitment to effectively develop users' information literacy and critical thinking competencies.

6. Discussion

This study examined the implementation, challenges, and effectiveness of Media and Information Literacy (MIL) programs in selected public and academic libraries in the Philippines, with a focus on the transition from information access to user competence. The findings reveal that while MIL programs are actively implemented, their perceived effectiveness varies across different levels of skill development.

The results indicate that library orientations (87.5%) and workshops or training sessions (75.0%) are the most commonly implemented media and information literacy (MIL) practices. This aligns with established literature identifying academic and public libraries as key institutional spaces for delivering structured information literacy instruction and user education [15,9]. Such practices are effective in introducing users to foundational information concepts, navigating library resources, and promoting responsible information use. The relationship between information literacy and library engagement has also been examined in higher education contexts [11]. However, the relatively lower implementation of digital learning activities (62.5%) suggests that technology-enhanced and interactive instructional approaches remain underutilized in some library contexts.

This gap reflects broader challenges documented in the literature regarding the transition from traditional, face-to-face instruction toward more dynamic, digitally mediated learning environments [7,12]. The need to strengthen digital literacy is also emphasized by IFLA's statement on digital literacy [5], while differences in users' internet skills suggest that digital competence cannot be assumed to be uniform across populations [2].

In terms of barriers, limited resources (80.0%) emerged as the most significant constraint, followed by uneven participation (70.0%) and insufficient integration of emerging digital issues (67.5%). These findings align with broader literature that identifies structural, institutional, and infrastructural limitations as persistent challenges in the implementation of media and information literacy (MIL) programs [7,12].

Resource constraints not only affect the availability of instructional materials and digital infrastructure but also limit the capacity of libraries to design, sustain, and scale MIL initiatives. Similarly, uneven participation suggests that although programs are available, user engagement remains inconsistent, which may weaken their educational impact and long-term effectiveness. Furthermore, the limited integration of contemporary digital issues such as misinformation, algorithmic bias, and artificial intelligence indicates that current MIL initiatives may not yet fully reflect the evolving complexities of today's information ecosystem [4,10].

The findings on program effectiveness indicate that participants generally perceived moderate competence across all Media and Information Literacy (MIL) competency domains, with relatively higher mean scores in information evaluation and critical thinking than in foundational information skills. Although the differences among competency domains were modest, the findings suggest that library-based MIL programs contribute positively to users' competency development while highlighting opportunities to further strengthen foundational information skills and promote higher-order learning.

This pattern aligns with the UNESCO (2023) Media and Information Literacy Framework [6], which emphasizes the progressive development of competencies from information access to evaluation, creation, and responsible use. However, the findings also support the concept of the Access–Competence Gap [1], indicating that while users are able to access and use information, developing higher-order cognitive skills such as critical analysis, interpretation, and informed judgment remains a continuing challenge [10].

Although participants reported moderate perceived competence in critical thinking, developing higher-order thinking skills may still be challenging with the continued reliance on short-term and lecture-oriented instructional approaches that prioritize basic information access over reflective and analytical engagement. Differences in internet skills among users further suggest that digital competence cannot be assumed to be uniform across populations [2]. While orientations and workshops are effective in introducing foundational literacy concepts, they may provide limited opportunities for users to engage in deeper evaluation, interpretation, and critical analysis of complex digital information. In addition, the rapid growth of artificial intelligence-generated content, misinformation, and algorithm-driven media environments requires more advanced evaluative competencies that may not yet be fully integrated into existing library-based MIL instruction [4,5,10]. These findings suggest that developing higher-order competencies requires sustained, participatory, and inquiry-based learning approaches rather than solely introductory or skills-based instruction.

The findings suggest that the identified Media and Information Literacy (MIL) practices and implementation barriers are evident across the selected public and academic libraries included in the study. Overall, participants reported moderate perceived competency levels, with relatively stronger perceptions in information evaluation and critical thinking than in foundational information skills. These findings highlight the need to strengthen instructional strategies, institutional support, and the integration of contemporary digital issues to further advance users from information access toward higher-order competence. Related research has also examined the interplay among information literacy, library engagement, and academic performance among university students, underscoring the broader educational value of information literacy [11]. The findings are also consistent with UNESCO's emphasis on developing media and information literate citizens who can think critically and use information responsibly [12].

The strategies identified by participants provide important insights into addressing these limitations. The emphasis on interactive teaching methods (75.0%) highlights the need for participatory and experiential

learning approaches, which have been shown to enhance engagement and retention of knowledge. The integration of digital issues (70.0%) underscores the importance of aligning MIL programs with current technological realities, particularly in addressing misinformation and AI-driven content. Additionally, librarian training (65.0%) and institutional support (62.5%) reflect the need for capacity-building and systemic reinforcement to ensure program sustainability and effectiveness.

The findings also carry important implications for library and educational policy. Strengthening Media and Information Literacy programs requires institutional investment in digital infrastructure, updated instructional resources, and continuous professional development for librarians and information professionals. Policies that support the integration of contemporary digital issues such as misinformation, artificial intelligence literacy, digital ethics, and algorithmic awareness into library instruction may help improve users' higher-order evaluative and critical thinking skills. Furthermore, stronger collaboration between libraries, educational institutions, and government agencies may contribute to more sustainable and context-responsive MIL initiatives across different learning environments.

Overall, the findings suggest that while MIL programs in Philippine libraries are effective in building foundational competencies, they require significant enhancement in content, delivery, and institutional support to fully develop higher-order user competence. Addressing these gaps is essential in enabling users to navigate increasingly complex digital information environments responsibly and critically.

7. Conclusion and Implication

This study explored the practices, barriers, and effectiveness of Media and Information Literacy (MIL) programs in selected public and academic libraries in the Philippines, focusing on the transition from information access to user competence. The findings demonstrate that libraries actively implement MIL programs through orientations, workshops, and digital learning activities that contribute to the development of users' Media and Information Literacy competencies.

Despite this progress, the study reveals that participants generally perceived moderate competence across all Media and Information Literacy competency domains. Relatively higher mean scores were observed in information evaluation and critical thinking, although all competency domains remained within the moderate descriptive category. These findings suggest that while library-based MIL programs contribute positively to users' competencies, continued enhancement is needed to further strengthen advanced analytical and evaluative skills. This indicates the persistence of an Access–Competence Gap, where users are able to access and utilize information but lack the advanced analytical abilities required for deeper evaluation and responsible decision-making in digital environments.

The effectiveness of MIL programs is further constrained by key barriers, including limited resources, uneven participation, insufficient manpower, and inadequate integration of emerging digital issues such as misinformation and artificial intelligence. These challenges highlight the need for more responsive and adaptive program design.

To address these issues, the study recommends strengthening MIL programs through the adoption of interactive and learner-centered teaching strategies, integration of contemporary digital topics, continuous professional development for librarians, and increased institutional support. These improvements are essential to enhance both the quality and sustainability of MIL initiatives.

In conclusion, while MIL programs in Philippine libraries play a vital role in promoting information access and foundational literacy, there is a need to move beyond basic instruction toward the development of

higher-order competencies. Bridging the gap between access and competence is crucial in empowering users to become critical, ethical, and informed participants in the digital information environment.

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