Capturing the Contours of the Field of Media and Information Literacy (MIL) Research: A Systematic Literature Review of Studies Conducted at Swedish Universities in 2021

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This chapter attempts to answer a commonplace question posed by authorities and practitioners seeking information on media and information literacy (MIL): What is MIL research, and, consequently, where can it be found? After the Swedish government formed a national network of MIL stakeholders in the public sector in the country with a common vision to strengthen policy work, it has become a crucial question how to identify and access the field of MIL research. The current study presents the results from a systematic literature review of scientific studies published in 2021 to identify the disciplinary structures of the research most relevant to MIL. The findings indicated that most of the relevant extant research was qualitative, conducted by women, written in English to an international audience, and focused on educational sciences, library and information science, and media and communication sciences. Student theses tended to adopt the policy-initiated concept of MIL more likely than original research papers. While the article probes whether the term MIL translates appropriately into scholarly literature, it also highlights the significance of establishing structures to further monitor related research projects and identify changes in research.

Keywords: media and information literacy (MIL) research, policy work, systematic literature review, scientific publishing, Sweden.

Media and information literacy (MIL) practitioners, promoters, and stakeholders need fact-based information and scientific knowledge to ground their activities. Typically, they must precisely define MIL research to localize it within the disciplinary structures of the academy. Accordingly, MIL stakeholders often express the need to identify researchers with profiles relevant to this scholarly discipline. Similarly, the question of identifying a research field and linking research to ongoing policy-related work becomes germane when the MIL framework is being built or reinforced within a nation. I refer to the representatives of authorities and practitioners in different fields such as libraries, archives, and museums as *MIL actors*. These professionals may lack the due knowledge of the internal structures of science and research and may not have a direct access to university resources. MIL remains a relatively new term with substantive local variations in its establishment, especially in the academy. Therefore, the support staff employed by universities cannot necessarily help university stakeholders find the relevant researchers and information.

This article attends particularly to Sweden and its national MIL ecology. The Swedish government launched a nationwide effort in 2018 to strengthen, organize, and map MIL in the country. Subsequently, questions about the character of MIL research, its locus, and its findability became topical. Well-documented groundwork has been performed on the concept and outlines of important MIL-related issues have been circulated in several academic publications (see e.g. Carlsson, 2014; 2018). However, no systematic concept-based overview of the actors involved in MIL research existed in Sweden. This difficulty stemmed from the lack of systematic evidence on the concept's use across disciplines and the absence of a common forum or network for related research. In other words, no national association of MIL actors monitored and collected research or connected researchers in Sweden, unlike in many other countries. Examples of such for a include, to name but a few, the Finnish Society on Media Education, the Italian Association for Media Education (MED), and the Association for Media Education in Scotland.

In this chapter, I present the findings of a systematic literature review that focused on research conducted in a single year.[1] I performed this review to acquire baseline evidence of the structures and forms of scholarly investigations that could constitute *MIL research*. I will argue in this chapter that the concept of MIL research does not necessarily exist in academic structures as a field. Rather, the term denotes an analytical construction intended to apprehend a body of research that can be positioned in relation to equivalent policy work (see Jaakkola, 2022). Indeed, MIL must be construed as a policy-based term that is not directly, or at least not exhaustively, adopted in academic literature. The term's appearance and frequency of use in published academic literature can nonetheless be investigated to determine the varied ways and contexts in which the term is explicitly applied. I refer to research that overtly harnesses the MIL framework by explicitly using the term MIL or another equivalent phrasing such as "media literacy" or "information literacy" as *explicit MIL research*. In contrast, *implicit MIL research* connects more indirectly to the concept of MIL and does not necessarily mention the term or its parallels. The current study investigated the explicit MIL research through a systematic literature review of the relevant studies published in Sweden in 2021.

UNESCO's (2013) policy framework recommendations and guidelines explain that research is central to policy work because it represents the dynamic space of knowledge production. Therefore, the comprehension of how MIL translates into academic research is acutely pertinent for all nations engaged in the construction of national MIL frameworks. In order to discuss the translatability of this concept in research in the country ecology under study, I will first describe MIL in the context of Swedish policy and national MIL ecology and thereafter present the methodological design of the current study. The examination of the Swedish MIL policy and education context makes an interesting case because, unlike other Nordic countries, Sweden has directly adopted the English-language UNESCO-concept MIL and applied it to the national language and culture. The results of this study are expected to yield information on the fundamental disciplinary structures of research initiatives that most closely resemble the academic domain that we can label *MIL research*.

[1] A previous version of the study was written in Swedish and titled *Forskning inom medie- och informationskunnighet (MIK): En översikt över 2021*. This version can be accessed at https://gupea.ub.gu.se/handle/2077/73711.

The adoption of the concept of MIL policy in the literature would elucidate the disciplines most intensively engaged in implementing the concept. It would also allow us to determine which disciplines tend to work closely with the policy-based and practical fields that actively use the term MIL. Moreover, such adoption would reveal potentially apposite disciplines that have not yet adopted the term.

The Operationalization of MIL and its Translatability into Research

The term "media and information literacy" and its catchy and pragmatic abbreviation MIL were coined by UNESCO in 2011 (Wilson et al., 2011). While numerous terms and related definitions continue to co-exist (see e.g. Potter, 2022), MIL has attained worldwide popularity as a policy concept. Gradually, the term has been adopted in many countries as a core concept that essentially guides and directs policy. With core concepts (Jaakkola, 2020) I refer to the most frequently used terms that have been established in the official discourse of a country and accepted by the most actors relevant for MIL, conveying certain meanings and connotations, while, at the same time, excluding or ignoring others. The core concepts, in other words, direct our attention to certain dimensions of the media-related competencies, and the choice of terms, such as "digital literacy" or "media competence", may highlight different aspects of what the expected competencies are and what is needed to promote them. Across sectors, the term MIL has gained ground as *the* word to refer to the abilities to use, receive and create media in different forms.

Based on early definitions from media education (Masterman, 1985) and the U.S. Aspen Media Literacy Leadership Institute's definition from the 1992 media literacy conference (Aufderheide & Firestone, 1993; see also Livingstone, 2004), UNESCO has taken a leading role in defining MIL as 'the ability to access, evaluate, analyse and create media in a variety of forms' (UNESCO, 2011; Wilson et al., 2011; UNESCO, 2013). This definition, the outcome of extensive consultation processes, has been agreed upon and applied by the major media education agents around the world. As outlined as in the Fez declaration (UNESCO, 2011), it is a compound concept comprising both 'media' and 'information', which basically brings together disciplines from two directions, from 'media

studies' and information studies' (Livingstone et al., 2008; Leaning, 2019). More specifically, the definition encompasses three essential dimensions: (1) a production chain from a sender or encoder to a receiver or decoder (the communicative process), (2) different cognitive processes to manage media and their content (competencies) and (3) a variety of media forms (media types). Significant emphasis has been placed on the component of textual analysis: decoding and deconstructing messages within a context. More recently, MIL abilities have been examined in the context of digital media landscapes, and more emphasis has been placed on digital-native phenomena, such as disinformation, copyright, digital content creation through hybrid production forms, algorithms and algorithmic cultures and artificial intelligence. This shift may place more emphasis on alternative concepts related to the digital, such as digital literacy and digital competence, and make the umbrella concept of MIL valid in more disciplines and interdisciplinary settings. Moreover, in alignment with the basic human rights, upon which the framework is based, the pursuit of the United Nation's (UN) sustainability development goals has been advanced as a central objective:

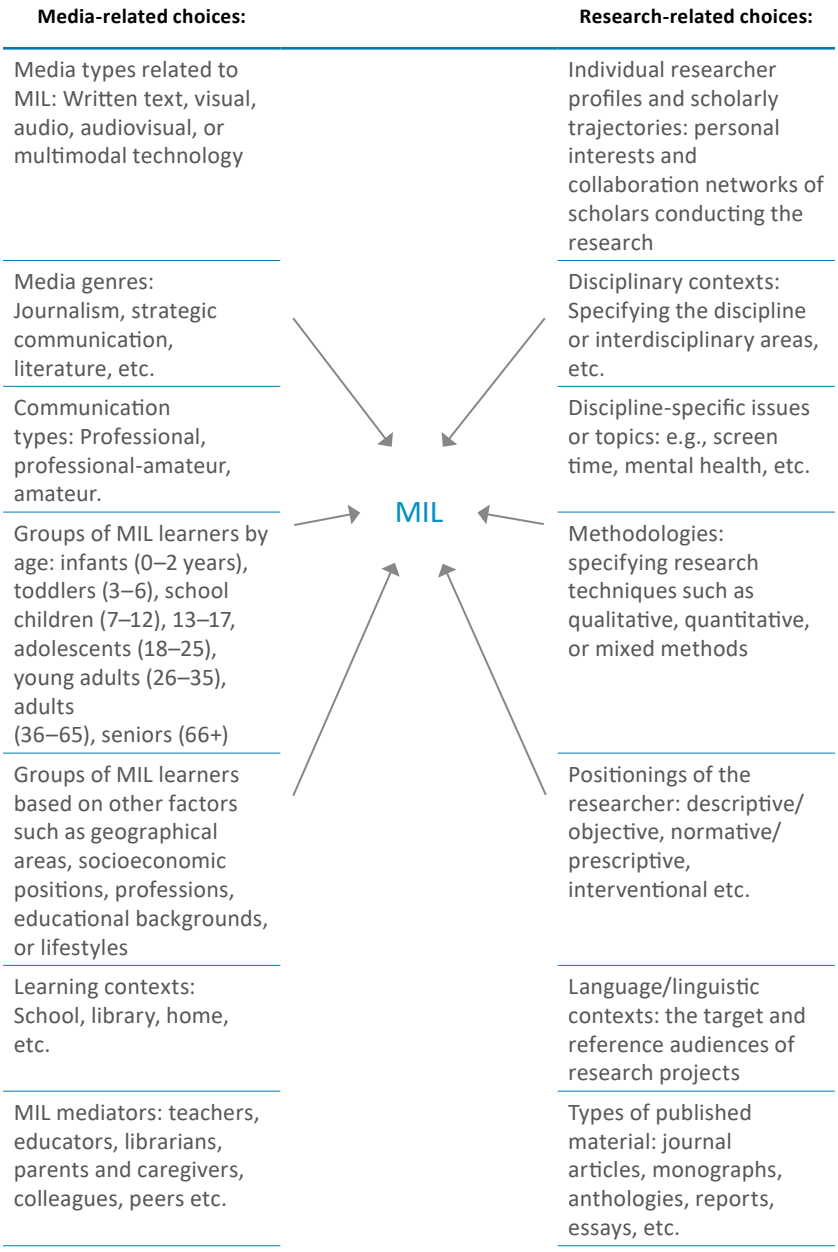
> MIL equips citizens with the following competencies: the ability to understand information for public good: the ability to critically engage with information, media and digital communication for participation in sustainable development goals; and the ability to seek and enjoy the full benefits of fundamental human rights' (Grizzle et al., 2021).

The umbrella term MIL has been critically examined and questioned regarding its explanatory potential and ability to function as a coherent concept, considering the diverging technological focuses, preferred methodologies and disciplinary vocabularies of media- and information-oriented sciences (Livingstone et al., 2008; Koltay, 2011; Frau-Meigs, 2012; Wuyckens et al., 2022; Haider & Sundin, 2022). Despite the breadth and complexity of the concept, policy discussions have a tendency of reducing the term to a vaccine towards global problems such as disinformation, regarding it as a 'cure' or 'solution' 'for everything' (Buckingham, 2019). Since it has also been strongly associated with all 'good aims', such as intercultural dialogue, justice, and peace education, the term has been criticised for uncritically and overoptimistically regarded seen as a solution to democratic problems (McDougall, 2017). Because of this policy-oriented and instrumentalising treatment, many scholars do not identify as MIL researchers but, rather, approach MIL-related questions from their own disciplinary traditions. Rather, MIL appears as a more relevant concept

of translating and collecting ideas in encounters between disciplines and between the academy and society.

To operationalise the concept of MIL, MIL actors make choices regarding the central components of MIL, such as the type of media that is addressed, genres that are represented, the target group of the MIL or the intended learners, and so on. Some of these choices are more conscious than others, but, nevertheless, the result of these choices manifest in a specific profile of MIL. A similar set of choices is included in every study that has the intention to address MIL: researchers are examining, for example, toddlers' skills in using a tablet computer, or primary school teachers' attitudes towards using a tablet in their teaching. In the first case, the learners are defined as small children under the age of 6, and in the second case as adults representing a certain profession, perhaps within a certain geographical area or limited to a certain school type, a distinct app on the tablet or discrete communication situations, and so on. Moreover, research is double-mediated in terms of MIL, as a research design includes choices related to both the manifested MIL in the object of study and choices related to the research design itself. A point of departure for examining MIL research thus constitutes the assumption that MIL research typically relates to some basic components that locate it in the sphere of media and communication, as well as related disciplinary traditions, as depicted in Figure 1. In the operationalised concept of MIL involves a demarcation of the media type, genre and communication type, as well as expected communicators and learners, in a specific learning context. Some categories may be more clearly defined than others; there may be some normative assumptions about the learners, the media, or the type of communication in a way that there are no limitations mentioned to them.

Figure 1. Choices for the operationalization of the concept of MIL



Source: Own elaboration.

There is, in other words, always a gap between the manifested MIL that comes into being through the operationalization and the general concept of MIL that is outlined in the general discourse. Therefore, when studies are addressing MIL, it is relevant to ask what kind of a manifested MIL profile they actually examine. The semantic uses of the MIL-related concepts in policy and practice have been examined in different regions, both in national or linguistic or cultural ecologies (Parola & Ranieri, 2011; Abu-Fadil et al., 2016; Trültzsch-Wijnen et al., 2017, Bonami & Le Voci Sayad, 2020; Palsa & Salomaa, 2020) and in a comparative manner (Frau-Meigs et al., 2017; Dhiman, 2021; Jaakkola, 2022). Academic research on the key concepts of media literacy, media and information literacy and digital literacy, as well as their mutual relation, has aroused the scholarly interest to trace the conceptual landscapes around MIL (Koltay, 2011; Hicks et al., 2022; Wuyckens et al., 2022). The Nordic countries exhibit a strong tradition of promoting MIL but have not adopted a shared framework that would include the use of identical terminology to refer to MIL (Carlsson, 2018, 2019; Forsman, 2020). Finland was the first to introduce a national MIL strategy (for the updated policy, see Palsa & Salomaa, 2019) while Sweden has worked intensively on mapping existing MIL actors to recognize their connection to a MIL framework that is intricately connected to UNESCO's policy framework. I will describe the Swedish policy work context in more detail in the next section.

The Swedish Policy Context

Policy work refers to theoretical development, policy formulation and strategy development related to a certain thematic area. It encompasses the components of policymaking, capacity-building and stakeholder management. According to UNESCO's policy and strategy guidelines (Grizzle et al., 2013), a successful and effective MIL policy relies on a shared vision of MIL. In addition to this vision, which implies a strict understanding of MIL, five more elements are required: consensus, incentives, resources, competencies and an action plan (ibid., 101).

In Sweden, the MIL concept was adopted with a domesticated term with high similarity to the global English term: MIK, from the composite Swedish-language term *medie- och informationskunnighet*. The inclusion of the word *kunnighet* is a rather unique choice since it is otherwise not

widely used in the Swedish language, unlike its derivatives *kunskap* (knowledge) and *kunnande* (competence). Semantically, the word *kunnighet* falls between *kunskap* (knowledge) and *kompetens* (competence), though it is not reducible to either of these terms. The national school curriculum, while mentioning 'media' several times, applies the term digital competence (Skolverket, 2018), while libraries endorse the term MIL as a carrier of information literacy (KB, 2022), and MIL has also become the established term on the national media policy agenda (Carlsson, 2016).

UNESCO released its MIL curriculum for teachers (Wilson et al., 2011), and this model curriculum was translated and transferred into the national Swedish context. Nordicom, in collaboration with the Swedish Media Council, Swedish Film Institute, Swedish National Agency for Education, and a film literacy association, prepared a Swedish report that translated the model curriculum, which it labeled the "framework" (*ramverk*) (Carlsson, 2013). This pedagogical scaffolding applied the UNESCO model curriculum and can therefore be considered a translation of the global framework to national conditions. An anthology (Carlsson, 2014) contributing to the establishment of MIL (or the Swedish variant of MIK) as a core concept followed as an outcome of a Nordic expert summit. These documents frame MIL as an issue pertaining to democracy and democratic citizenship. The concept's connection to democracy and freedom of speech continued in two later publications, an edited collection in Swedish (Carlsson, 2018) and an amended and adapted English version published jointly with the UNESCO MIL Feature Conference in Gothenburg (Carlsson, 2019). These academically driven discussions and anthologies also included contributions from policymakers and educators and served to consolidate the utilization of the term across numerous political, practical, and pedagogical sectors. The Swedish government's (SOU 2016:30) review of media politics (see also the Swedish Ministry of Culture, 2016) addressed the need for MIL and used MIK as the umbrella term for "understandings of media and communication society, source criticism, ethical and critical thinking, uses of information, communication with others, create content and express oneself in different forms of content and dissemination, understand technology and relevant legislatory frameworks" (Carlsson, 2016, 504).

Consequently, the Swedish government's democratic strategy principally anchored the significance of MIL in democratic societies (the Swedish Government, 2018). Accordingly, the Ministry of Culture (2018) launched

a committee directive to review the national MIL landscape to arrange a venture through which an authoritative body could coordinate and promote MIL-related endeavors at the national level. The final report on this review was published in 2020 (Heath, 2020). Based on this review, the Swedish government (2019) tasked the Swedish Media Council with national coordination and with intensifying efforts to strengthen MIL in the country. The term MIL was in frequent use in policy discourse at this juncture.

The Swedish Media Council was launched in 2011 under the aegis of the Ministry of Culture, after the merger of two regulatory agencies that had, among other things, supervised the provision of audiovisual programs promoting children's safety. This council embarked on the journey of structuring national MIL efforts and was reconfigured, after another merger with the Swedish Broadcasting Authority in 2024, into one single media authority, the Swedish Agency for the Media. Its governmental assignment (the Swedish Government 2019) stipulates that the structuring of MIL work encompasses the tasks of creating a multistakeholder network; constructing a platform to disseminate MIL-related knowledge and information; mapping and monitoring MIL development; and developing MIL capacities of the Swedish authorities.

In 2020, the Swedish Media Council launched an MIL network labeled Network MIL Sweden (Nätverket MIK Sverige). Conjointly, a research network named the Academic Forum for MIL Research (Akademiskt forum för MIK-forskning) was launched to collaborate with the Network MIL Sweden, and its coordination was assigned to Nordicom at the University of Gothenburg. The Network MIL Sweden comprised 22 members in October 2021[2] and the Academic Forum for MIL Research was constituted

[2] The members included the Digidel Network, the associations Filmpedagogerna and Folkets Bio, the Swedish National Council of Adult Education, the association Filmregionerna, the Swedish Internet Foundation, the Swedish Consumer Agency, the National Library of Sweden, Mediekompass by TU, The Swedish Press, Radio and Broadcasting Authority, the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB), the Swedish Agency for Accessible Media (MTM), the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society (MUCF), Nordicom, the National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools (SPSM), the Swedish Media Council, the Swedish Agency of Education, the Swedish Library Association, the Swedish Film Institute, the Swedish Association of

approximately of 50 active researchers. The members of the Network MIL Sweden included representatives of institutions undertaking public sector MIL tasks; corporations and the private sector were thus excluded. The objectives of the networking activities focused on capacity building: to collaborate and identify needs, support the work of fellow members by sharing knowledge and developing methods, elucidate the need for MIL, and raise awareness of MIL in internal and external contexts (SMC, 2021). One of the most recent undertakings of these networking bodies has entailed mapping MIL initiatives among publicly funded stakeholders (Wagner, 2023; Wagner & Bucht, 2023).

In sum, the Swedish concept of MIL policy was consolidated through multistaged policy development endeavors centered on anchoring the concept's legitimacy among stakeholders. Thus, the country adopted a bottom-up rather than a top-down approach to the organization of its MIL framework. The groundwork was conducted by identificating actors focal to MIL and engaging them in common networking activities instead of creating and imposing a centralized strategy on existing and potential stakeholders.

Research Questions

This study investigates explicit MIL research published in 2021, aiming to identify the production and publication venues and contexts of this type of research activity. In other words, I seek to answer the following questions:

- Where, in terms of dicsiplines, can MIL research be located on the basis of published studies that explicitly use the concept or the most frequently use related concepts?
- Where is MIL research published?
- Who produces MIL research?
- What are the key topics and objectives of MIL research?

Local Authorities and Regions, the Swedish Museum Association, Sveriges Utbildningsradio (UR), and Ung Media Sverige.

A focal motive of this study is to test a data collection method with national and international research databases for future attempts to regularly encapsulate MIL research of explicit character. The groundwork requires the identification of the general structures of MIL research: its key disciplines, types of published material, channels of dissemination, and the forms of authorship evident in its production and publication. However, further analyses can attend to the narratives, themes, and tendencies, and address other less significant concepts, discourses, and frames within this framework.

Methodology

Data were systematically collected from the literature published in 2021 to conduct a systematic literature review (e.g., Xiao & Watson, 2019) on MIL research. I rejected automated bibliometric analysis using prevalent data tools such as Bibliometrix, Wordmancer, or VosViewer (see Moral-Muñoz et al., 2020) because these tools retrieve data from databases dominated by the natural sciences and do not sufficiently cover pedagogical, media, and cultural studies relevant to national-level MIL. In other words, these tools do not record the popular publication channels for MIL research; instead, they are based on bibliometrics and altimetrics that rank MIL studies low or even omit them from their valid results.

I conducted the literature search in May 2022 using the national academic literature database DiVA Portal and the publication registers of four universities that had not joined DiVA portal.[3] DiVA (Digitala Vetenskapliga Arkivet) is an open online search service that collects published work from 50 Swedish educational and research organizations. I used identical search phrases and functions for all the databases. Moreover, I searched the National Library of Sweden's scientific database Swepub and the international databases Scopus, Web of Science, and PubMed to complement and validate the results obtained from the national databases. Swepub, Web of Science, and PubMed did not identify any published items that had not been included in the sample retrieved from the national databases. However, Scopus, Elsevier's database for the life sciences, social sciences, physical sciences, and health sciences, returned some complementary

[3] These institutions included the University of Gothenburg, Lund University, Chalmers University of Technology, and Stockholm School of Economics.

findings of English-language studies to which Swedish researchers had contributed as members of multinational teams.

I used the following search phrases along with their truncations: the Swedish terms *medie- och informationskunnighet*, *mediekunnighet*, *mediekompetens*, *informationskompetens*, *mediepedagogik*, *medielitteracitet*, *mediemedvetenhet*, *and digital kompetens*, and the English terms *media and information literacy*, *media literacy*, *information literacy*, *media competence*, *information competence*, *media education*, *digital literacy*, and *digital competence*. I also utilized fields or functions to identify search phrases in all metadata, including the titles, abstracts, and keywords of studies. MIL was assumed to be incorporated within the key components of a study if the term constituted a central concept in the published work.

The initial literature search identified 398 published studies from the national databases. Duplicated and irrelevant titles were manually excluded. The excluded items included the search terms but did not display any connection to MIL. To exemplify, such published work included studies in the health sciences that discussed health literacy in a mediatized world but omitted the focal aspect of media and media literacy. For instance, an article could address parents of asthmatic children and probe their awareness of new medicines. Indeed, health literacy represented a relatively substantial research field that was excluded along with some other applied literacy areas addressing cultural heritage, design, and plant literacy. The study sample comprised 211 published items after the exclusion of such material. The complementary literature search conducted using Scopus for studies published in 2021 yielded 49 published items from Sweden, of which 14 were deemed relevant and added to the sample. The final sample comprised 225 items, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Published studies identified from different databases before and after manual selection*

Database	Total number *(N)* of published studies	Total number *(n)* of selected published studies
DiVA	300	187
GUP	52	16
Lund	28	4
Chalmers	18	4
Scopus	49	14
Combined databases	*447*	*225*

Source: Own elaboration.

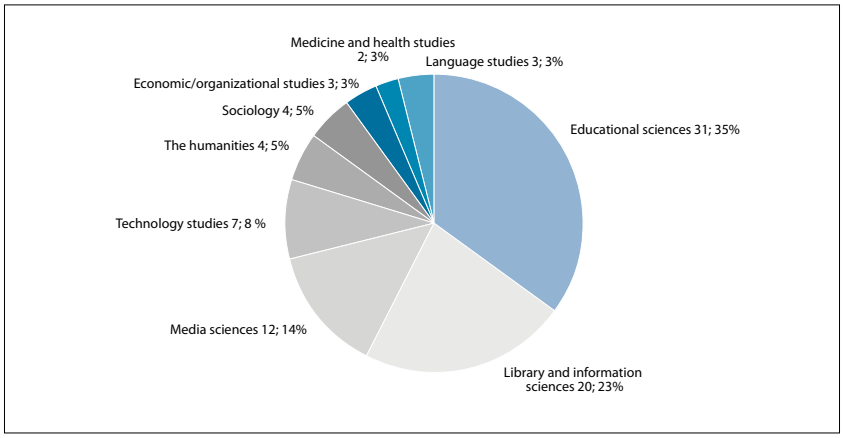
This study used a published study as its unit of analysis. Each article was coded for the variables to perform a simple content analysis. Departing from the choices depicted in Figure 1 to manifest a certain type of MIL within a research unit, the categories applied for the published works included the author name(s), number of authors, author affiliation(s) (for up to four authors credited sequentially), author gender (a binary 'male' or 'female' based on the author's name), title, discipline, type of published work, language, and method of analysis (theoretical or empirical). The categories applied to the study object – MIL – included the groups of people who were labeled as "MIL carriers" with regard to their ages and roles. the context of learning.

Disciplines

The 225 published items in which the author(s) explicitly used the term MIL or discussed a closely related concept were grouped according to their disciplines before categories were constructed from the data and compared against the bibliometric metadata. Figure 2 shows that most of the sampled published studies belonged to the pedagogical or educational domain (35%), followed by research initiatives in the library and information (23%) and media and communication (14%) sciences. Thus, MIL research was found to be most closely related to pedagogical studies and social sciences. Other disciplines present in the sample included domains related to technology, the humanities (e.g., literary studies), economics, medicine, and health sciences. Typically, the published works were located in sociologically or societally oriented subdisciplinary areas such as sociolinguistics (as an aspect of linguistics), consumption research (economic studies), and

educational gerontology (medical studies), or were directed toward the analysis of power structures.

Figure 2. Discipline-based distribution of the published studies



Source: Own elaboration.

Educational sciences, library and information sciences, and media sciences, the three most voluminous disciplines in the sample are defined by *MIL as a topic*. They "own" MIL by treating it as a theme that is inherently connected to the sets of objects of study that their disciplines are expected to examine. MIL is essentially expounded by these three disciplines: It is approached in educational sciences as a question of teaching and learning and the use of media for pedagogical purposes; it is probed in library and information sciences as a means of handling information; and it is explored in media studies as an issue pertaining to the use and production of media. Hicks and colleagues (2022, n.p.) describe the relationship between library and information science and information literacy as follows: "it forms the focus of scholarship, conferences, journals and teaching librarian practice, alike." Conversely, we can also identify disciplines defined by MIL as an aspect. These domains are represented in Figure 2 as the minor disciplines. The ontological focus of the central infrastructures of these minor disciplines is perpetually situated elsewhere than on MIL. However, MIL can occasionally be examined under their purview because it is experienced as domain-relevant. For example, the health sciences principally study health and health-related issues among a population as their research objects, but reading or creating media messages can denote a factor contributing to health awareness or behavior. Finally,

interdisciplinary research initiatives tend to fluctuate between the topic and aspect definitions, as may be observed in studies concerning topics such as literacy, children's culture, and civic or citizenship education.

The three major disciplines focusing on MIL applied slightly varying core concepts. The educational sciences diverged substantively in the concepts outlined in the keywords of their published studies: media and information literacy were the most used keywords but digital competence, digital literacy, and academic literacy were also often utilized. The most frequently employed core concepts in the library and information sciences were information literacy and information competence. Published works in media studies tended to employ media education, media literacy, and digital literacy as keywords. Disciplines designated to the aspect position often attempted to describe the study object through kinship concepts such as participation or added specifying epithets to an established concept: for instance, "intercultural digital literacy" or *med(ie) vetenhet*, "media knowledge or consciousness", which refers to a play with the words *mediemedvetenhet* (media consciousness), *vetenhet* (knowledge), and *medvetenhet*, (consciousness).

The methods noted in the sample of published studies methods were categorized primarily as theoretical or empirical. Theoretical studies presented conceptual constructs of MIL, reflected on previous academic literature, and represented a minority in the sample. This finding was unsurprising, given the empirical inclinations of the three previously stated leading MIL disciplines, educational sciences, library and information sciences, and media studies. Theoretical research constituted 21% (n = 19) of the study's subsample, whereas 79% (n = 70) of the results were derived from empirical evidence collected as a part of the research design. Most of the studies (84%, n = 51) employed a qualitative methodology and some (11%, n = 7) used a mixed methods (both qualitative and quantitative) approach. Therefore, very few studies (only 5%, n = 3) were quantitative. Thus, the ethos of the MIL research included in the sample was significantly qualitative.

MIL-related research is often conducted in proximity to the domains of MIL promoters. Such scholarly investigation is labeled *strategic research*, *applied science*, or *practice-based research* across disciplines. MIL-related research often involves and engages people and organizations outside academies and employs collaborative, participatory, or interventionalist

methods such as ethnography, action research, citizen research, or cocreation. Even research areas focusing on professional domains tend to develop an organic relationship with the MIL-promotion work performed by the authorities and civil society actors. Research domains linked to pedagogy and targeting professionals such as teachers, librarians, sociologists, and journalists may be cited as examples. Some research approaches are descriptive, seeking to document activities and identify functional practices, while others are more normative or prescriptive, outlining norms and models for activities. Researchers can facilitate the amelioration of the relevant practices and services by conducting interventional studies.

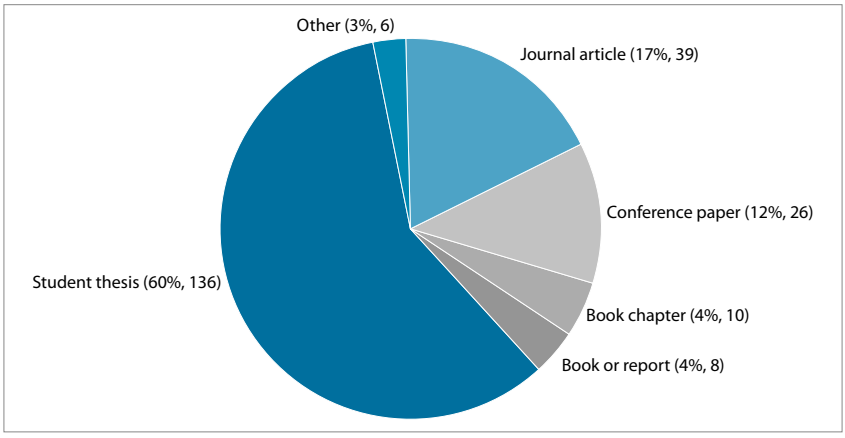
Types of Published Materials

The sample (N = 225 studies) was categorized by the types of scholarly investigations, revealing that many of the collected titles were student theses: 136 (60%) of the 225 titles in the sample were written by students as part of their education. Thus, student theses definitively constituted the largest category of the total material, implying that students represented the cohort most inclined to follow the policy debates, public discussions, and pedagogical discourses of organizations in which the MIL concept is typically evoked. Students could also have encountered the concept of MIL in their studies in media, school, or library sciences, typically via authority figures and strategic documents ranging from school curricula to library plans. This exposure could have served as an entry point for students into the MIL domain. The concept of MIL could certainly offer novices an easy entry point because newscomers generally lack a fully developed theoretical repertoire of concepts and discourses from which to derive alternative terms. Many student theses also demonstrated a pragmatic approach because of the ambition to develop a certain professional practice or area. For instance, MIL appears conceptually appropriate in the context of collaborations between school teachers and librarians. Most of the reviewed student theses were written at institutions offering teacher education: Malmö University (n = 18), Uppsala University (n = 14), Linnæus University (n = 13), and Karlstad University (n = 10). The student thesis category included two doctoral theses and one licentiate thesis.

Figure 3 presents the categories by the types of published materials. Original research was most often published as journal articles, which

comprised 17 percent (n = 39) of the entire sample and 44 percent of the published research subsample (from which student theses were excluded). A large proportion (80%, n = 31) of the journal articles and book chapters (n = 39) in the sample were peer-reviewed. Of the total sample of published studies, 12 percent (n = 26) were conference papers, 4 percent (n = 10) were book chapters, and 4 percent (n = 8) were full books or reports. The residual category "other" (3%, n = 6) comprised academic book reviews and popular texts such as essays written by academics in cultural magazines or newspapers.

Figure 3. Types of published studies



Source: Own elaboration.

Most of the published material (70%) was written in Swedish, and only one-third were inscribed in English. However, more than half of the remaining texts (68%) were revealed to have been written in the academic lingua franca English when student theses were excluded from the sample. Nevertheless, the share of English-language research can be deemed relatively low. The present-day Swedish academy is very international: on average, 35 percent of the students enrolled at Swedish universities hailed from non-Swedish backgrounds in 2021 (SCB, 2022). Additional studies that are not included in the sample are expected to have been internationally published. The sizable proportion of studies published in Swedish in the sample may be attributed to numerous media aspects being bound to the national structures and languages of the media landscape along with debates conducted in the national public sphere. Moreover, impactful MIL research could target MIL agents in a given country to

influence its policies, pedagogies, and practices. Policy-oriented research is closely connected to the field, and this feature could induce researchers to publish in a national language. Further, discrete disciplines evince varying traditions of international publishing; some disciplines could prefer to publish their studies in national languages.

The three journals in the sample with MIL as their focal theme were international peer-reviewed publications: *Journal of Media Literacy Education (JMLE)*, *Media Educational Research Journal (MERJ)*, and the *Nordic Journal of Digital Literacy*. Table 2 reveals that the sample also included journals on library and information science, educational research, media research, technology research, medical research, and health science.

Table 2. *Journals in Sweden and abroad that published the studies included in the sample*

Discipline	Journals published in Sweden	Journals published abroad
MIL as the primary topic	-	*Journal of Media Literacy Education, Media Educational Research Journal, Nordic Journal of Digital Literacy*
Library and information sciences	*Information Research* (University of Borås), *Tidskrift för ABM* (Uppsala University)	*Information, Journal of Documentation, Journal of Information Science, Education for Information*
Pedagogical research	*Högre Utbildning* (Stockholm University/ Cappelen Damm)	*Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research, Education Inquiry, British Journal of Educational Technology, Athens Journal of Education, Viden om literacy, Revista Electrónica de Investigación y Evaluación Educativa, Classroom Discourse, Education and Information Technologies, Early Childhood Education Journal*
Media and communication sciences	*Nordicom Review* (Nordicom/University of Gothenburg), *Journal of Digital Social Research* (JDSR) (DIGSUM/Umeå University)	*Media, Culture & Society, Explorations in Media Ecology, Media and Communication*
Technology research	-	*Computers and Education Open, Telecommunications Policy, Technology and Education*

Discipline	Journals published in Sweden	Journals published abroad
Medicine and health research	-	*Acta Pædiatrica, Educational Gerontology, Journal of Medical Internet Research, Patient Education and Counseling*
Cultural research	-	*Journal of Music*

Source: Own elaboration.

With respect to academic journals, two types of scientific journals publish MIL research: those with MIL as their principal theme, and those for which MIL was one possible topic. The main aims and scopes of the former type mention or specifically focus on MIL: for instance, the internationally published *Media Education Journal* or *Nordic Journal of Digital Literacy*. The aims and scope of the second type of journal allow the publishing of MIL research as one aspect of a more expansive publication strategy: for example, the Nordic journals *Educare*, *Information Research*, and *Nordicom Review*. Journals of the first type are most often published for the international market and include several MIL-focused periodicals such as the *Media Education Journal* and the *Journal of Media Education* published by the Broadcast Education Association, MERJ issued by Auteur Publishing in the United Kingdom, *JMLE* circulated by the National Association of Media Literacy Education in the United States, and *The International Journal of Media and Information Literacy* printed by Issledovatel' in Slovakia. No scientific journal in Sweden explicitly focuses on media education or literacy. All journals in the domains of media and communication sciences, library and information science, cultural research, and linguistics consider manuscripts related to MIL aspects if they also address their specific discipline-related aspects.

Authorship

Table 3 evidences that most authors of the study sample of published studies were affiliated with the universities in Gothenburg on the southwestern coast of Sweden, Borås, and Uppsala in the north. The University of Gothenburg is Sweden's largest university, and the University of Borås operates a library and information science school. The remaining researchers were affiliated with other universities scattered across the country.

Table 3. *Affiliations of the authors of the works included in the sample of scientific research*

University	N	%
University of Gothenburg	23	12%
Uppsala University	17	9%
University of Borås	16	8%
Lund University	14	7%
Umeå University	13	7%
Malmö University	11	6%
Chalmers University of Technology	9	5%
Karlstad University	9	5%
Stockholm University	7	4%
Linnæus University	5	3%
Linköping University	5	3%
University of Gävle	4	2%
Halmstad University	2	1%
University West	4	2%
Jönköping University	3	2%
Södertörn University	3	2%
Other	7	4%
University abroad	43	22%
	195	100%

Source: Own elaboration.

Accounting for the first four authors of each published study in the sample, the authors represented 20 different affiliations. Of the authors, one-fifth were affiliated with a university abroad and had collaborated with scholars employed at a Swedish university.

The number of authors of published studies averaged 2.9 in the sample, implying that MIL research is often conducted collaboratively by colleagues. However, working in researcher groups or labs probably remains less common in the disciplines in the sample that most represented MIL research than in the natural or "hard" sciences. One noteworthy article in the sample represented a medical science investigation that remarkably credited 59 coauthors.

Keywords, MIL Learners and Learning Contexts

All published scientific studies in the sample contained keywords that were typically determined by their authors. Conversely, the metadata in the databases, such as the descriptions of themes and disciplines, were inserted by information specialists at libraries. Figure 4 displays a word cloud containing the keywords used in the published research subsample obtained after the student theses were excluded. The word cloud demonstrates that the most frequently used keywords in the published studies in the subsample included *fake news*, *learning*, *reading promotion*, *school library*, and *teaching*. The words *fact-checking*, *disinformation* and *misinformation*, *critical thinking*, *higher education*, *COVID-19*, and *information search* appeared less frequently. The major keywords are extremely illustrative of source criticism, recognize the value of validated information, and emphasize fact-checking practices in the context of libraries and higher education, which seem to characterize the Swedish MIL research orientation in general. In addition, the promotion of reading is prominent as a policy and practice that has received scholarly attention. The global coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic that persisted until 2021 formed an essential context for such studies.

Figure 4. A word cloud of keywords included in the subsample of published studies obtained after student theses were excluded

Source: Own elaboration.

Children and young people are often prioritized in public discussions on MIL-related issues and seen as the primary group of MIL learners – the carriers of MIL or those who are expected to acquire and possess MIL competencies. However, in this study, the groups of learners whose MIL skills were studied in the sample were more often university teachers, school librarians, university students, adult citizens (neither young nor elderly), and professional groups other than teachers and librarians, rather than children and young people. The stated populations of MIL learners were typically employees studied in the organizational context of workplace learning. Most research projects (74%, $n = 66$) dealt with adults, and only 11 percent ($n = 10$) concerned children and youth aged under 20 years. In addition, the MIL target group was not identifiable in 11 percent ($n = 10$) of the study sample. The roles studied as MIL learners included students (20%, $n = 18$), citizens (16%, $n = 14$), teachers (12%, $n = 11$), librarians (6%, $n = 5$), employees (7%, $n = 6$), patients (3%, $n = 3$), pupils (4%, $n = 4$), researchers (2%, $n = 2$), and consumers or customers (1%, $n = 1$), and around 25 percent could not be identified. As the MIL mediators (see Fig. 1) were often implicit in the study designs, such as the parents and caregivers when it comes to children or minors as MIL learners, these were not separately examined in the studies.

As for the operational contexts of MIL, seen here as the contexts of learning, the highest number of published studies in the sample were centered on media use in everyday contexts. These investigations comprised around one-fourth of the research subsample and indicated informal learning occurring during leisure periods. Approximately 19 percent ($n = 17$) of the published studies discussed higher education, and approximately 18 percent ($n = 16$) addressed children's education in contexts such as schools, preschools, and afterschool clubs. Such a high volume of research related to academic literacy and higher education practices could indicate two eventualities: first, considerable research related or relevant to MIL is produced through pedagogy courses conducted at universities for academic personnel, and second, many scholars are willing to study personal activities or, at least, activities closely related to their work. This aspect of MIL-related research is significant because it implies that MIL can function focally in supporting the continuing education and workplace learning of academics. Such assistance encourages researchers to become more reflective and media literate as practitioners and simultaneously produces knowledge on media-related issues in academies and societies. In other words, MIL research is not only a discipline or a field of inquiry for researchers, but also a learning domain. In addition to school contexts,

10 percent (n = 9) of the published studies in the sample discussed MIL in the archives, libraries, and museums sector and 4 percent (n = 4) discussed MIL in healthcare.

Discussion

The reviewed literature published in 2021 implies that research on MIL is predominantly qualitatively oriented, directed toward international academic audiences, and generally adapted to the conditions prevailing in academic publishing. Contrary to a common belief, MIL is not regarded only as a concern pertinent only to children and the media; rather, the topic of literacy more generally penetrates academic and work life. MIL research is a way to study academic environments; thus, it promotes the academic and professional reflection of many researchers and generates new published work for their institutions. All disciplines have not equally endorsed the policy-based concept of MIL; however, the scholarly domains of education, information, and media have addressed this issue most frequently. Evidently, besides explicitly employing the term MIL, research strains have generally attended conceptually to MIL without explicitly mentioning it. Therefore, the shape of MIL research can never be strictly delimited. Despite such shortcomings, literature reviews such as the present chapter help to localize explicit MIL research in academies and are therefore valuable.

The limited sample size may be admitted as a drawback of his study. This sample was compiled via a pilot study intended to develop a methodology for further systematic monitoring and encompassed a single year of published material. Moreover, scholarly publishing in 2021 could might have been affected by the pandemic in one of two ways. First, fewer research initiatives may have been published because female researchers reportedly suffered the most from pandemic conditions (e.g., Shomotova & Karabchuk, 2022). Second, the productivity of researchers could have increased by working remotely or from home. Therefore, the monitoring of MIL research must be upgraded according to the guidelines tested in this study, and the volumes and variations of this study must be reviewed by considering a longer period.

Since this chapter's findings indicate that most of the explicit MIL research is conducted in disciplines that do not generally rank highly in major international databases such as Scopus or Web of Science but is qualitative and relatively small-scale, further literature reviews emphasising national databases and compatible data collection can be recommended. Unfortunately, this approach could preclude the direct applicability of common research tools developed for literature reviews and bibliometric analyses. Instead, the recommended literature reviews may mandate a lesser reliance on automated data collection, despite the fact that it would be worthwhile to develop automated tools to regularly monitor research conducted using national MIL frameworks.

Regular documentation of MIL research represents an important function of a national MIL framework. Therefore, policy work in a given geographical area should systematically and longitudinally monitor such research. Policymakers and practitioners could benefit from more limited thematic overviews when the research structures are known. Policy and research must remain in continuous dialogue; however, this discourse must maintain sufficient distance between societies and academies and respect the autonomy of academic investigations. Moreover, the disuse of the term MIL by researchers should not be interpreted as problematic: it could simply reflect a sound, indirect, but mediated relationship between research and policy work and indicate that research primarily builds upon its traditions instead of adopting and becoming subject to external influences.

Conclusion

This chapter's systematic literature review of research published in Sweden in 2021 indicated that scholars of the educational sciences, library and information science, and media studies come closest to "MIL researchers" and, besides, do not restrict MIL to children and youth populations. This finding also implies that these disciplines incorporate the subdisciplines or research areas most closely associated with MIL policy. Researchers in other disciplines such as sociology, linguistic studies, and literary studies could orient themselves toward the concept using other vocabularies. Indeed, the roots of the conception of MIL in policy and politics must be recognized in examining explicit MIL research.

This study was designed for a distinctly national context in which the MIL concept is more dominant and is potentially used more consistently across societal sectors than in some other countries. Nevertheless, the design of this study could offer valuable insights for the systematic study of MIL research in countries other than Sweden. In any case, research reviews must consider specific national discursive traditions and avoid data collection tools developed for sciences other than those for which MIL is standard. Also, cross-country comparisons could yield interesting information about specific national characteristics of research related to MIL.

To conclude, it is crucial to discover the general structures of the conducted research. However, policymakers and practitioners could also derive added benefits from more detailed information than can be presented via a systematic literature review similar to the study at hand. Popularizing and pedagogizing research remain extremely important. Researchers must continue to elaborate on the findings of their originally published research through collaborations achieved with the support of universities as well as third-party science communication and mediation organizations.

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