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The Role of Media Education in Forming a Tolerant Information Space in Multicultural Societies

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Abstract

This study aims to identify the key components and mechanisms for implementing media education in multicultural schools in Ukraine, informed by a comparative analysis of European strategies. Although media literacy and multicultural education have been widely examined, far less attention has been devoted to how national models translate into coherent, sustainable practices for fostering tolerance across diverse sociocultural environments. Addressing this gap, the study integrates a theoretical methodological review with a comparative analysis of six European countries—Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, France, Germany, and Sweden—focusing on shared structural patterns and divergences in policy design and implementation.

The findings reveal two distinct models of media education. The first comprises systemically integrated approaches (France, Sweden, Germany), characterised by compulsory curricula, institutional coordination, and clearly articulated competency frameworks. The second encompasses fragmented or optional models (Poland, Slovakia, Hungary), where media education is embedded within broader digital skills programmes and lacks unified structural coherence. Ukraine demonstrates a transitional model, combining project-based initiatives with emerging efforts toward standardisation and institutional consolidation.

Across all examined contexts, the effectiveness of media education is shaped by the degree of institutionalisation, the accessibility of pedagogical and technological resources, and the robustness of teacher training systems. The study argues for the incorporation of a compulsory media education component into national educational standards as a prerequisite for cultivating a coherent, inclusive, and resilient information environment. It further proposes the establishment of regional media laboratories and the introduction of regular monitoring of media literacy and intercultural tolerance indicators as practical mechanisms for implementation and continuous improvement.

Keywords: Critical Thinking; Cultural Interaction; Information Ethics; Citizen Media Literacy; Interethnic Communication

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Introduction

The intensification of intercultural contacts and the acceleration of migration processes have contributed to the emergence of increasingly multinational communities, where questions of mutual understanding and respect for cultural diversity acquire particular urgency. At the same time, scholars have drawn attention to the crisis of the “melting pot” paradigm, which shaped multicultural discourse for several decades (Joppke, 2004; Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010). Recent migration crises, the repercussions of the full-scale war in Ukraine, and the growing politicisation of migration and integration policies across Europe have further exposed tensions within multicultural societies, fuelling public debates on cultural diversity, security, and social cohesion (Frontex, 2023; Rozhkova et al., 2026).

Within these conditions, media exert a powerful influence on public sentiment and interethnic interaction. Media education seeks to cultivate critical thinking, analytical competencies for interpreting media content, and awareness of informational manipulation—capacities that collectively contribute to reducing discrimination, prejudice, and hate speech in the public sphere (Dudar & Molotkina, 2025; Malla et al., 2026). Consequently, examining the role of media education in shaping a tolerant information environment becomes a pressing task for societies striving for the harmonious coexistence of diverse ethnic, religious, and cultural groups. Such monitoring must extend beyond the school sector to encompass other age cohorts and socio-cultural categories.

Existing research on media education and its contribution to a tolerant information space has addressed several dimensions, including professional training for journalists, countering hate speech, and ensuring access to balanced information in multicultural contexts. Numerous studies emphasise the role of media education in fostering critical thinking, professional responsibility, and democratic values, particularly within journalism and media-professional training. Bidzilya et al. (2022) underscore the importance of interdisciplinary

approaches and lifelong learning in developing media literacy, while Sakallı et al. (2021) highlight education’s role in cultivating critical attitudes toward information and countering disinformation in a globalised media environment. These works demonstrate that media education is closely linked to the formation of socially responsible and critically aware audiences.

However, while much scholarship focuses on professional media training, the present study approaches media education as a broader social and pedagogical practice, particularly within school and community settings (Abakirov et al., 2024; Pancer-Cybulska & Zlenko, 2025; Rakhmetullina et al., 2021).

A parallel body of research examines the representation of ethnic minorities and the persistence of stereotypes in media discourse. Turgunov (2023) analyses manifestations of hate speech targeting the Roma community, while Todino and Di Tore (2025) highlight the insufficient representation of ethnic minorities in regional broadcasting. Similar concerns appear in the works of Tolochko (2020) and Marinos (2021), which emphasise both the risks of biased media coverage and the potential of inclusive media practices to foster intercultural dialogue and social cohesion.

Media education is also conceptualised within broader educational and institutional frameworks. The collection *Journalism of the Future* (2022) and the DESTIN project (Bezchotnikova et al., 2021) underscore the integration of intercultural competencies into educational programmes, while Bidzilya & Tolochko (2024) demonstrate how media representations of minority groups can simultaneously reproduce and challenge stereotypes. These approaches highlight the growing recognition of media education as a tool for fostering tolerance in multicultural societies, while also pointing to the media’s role in supporting minority identity and ensuring equitable access to information (Bidzilya, 2015; Rothberg et al., 2025).

Despite these contributions, the existing literature remains uneven. It tends to focus either on professional training or on isolated cases of media representation, without offering a systematic explanation of how media education operates as a broader mechanism for cultivating tolerance across diverse social groups and educational settings. In particular, insufficient attention has been paid to the development of practical intercultural communication skills and to the role of digital media in supporting tolerance within multicultural information environments.

To further conceptualise the notion of a “tolerant information space,” this study draws on perspectives from cultural geography and critical media studies. From this standpoint, information space is understood as socially produced rather than neutral—shaped by institutional structures, resource accessibility, and communication patterns, and unevenly experienced across spatial contexts, particularly along urban–rural and centre–periphery divides (Couldry & Hepp, 2022; Fuchs, 2011). Within this framework, *media education* is defined as a set of pedagogical practices aimed at developing critical engagement with media content, while a *multicultural society* is approached as a socio-spatial formation characterised by the coexistence of diverse cultural groups and unequal access to resources.

Accordingly, a *tolerant information space* is conceptualised as the outcome of interactions between media practices, educational interventions, and socio-cultural conditions. Media education thus functions as a mediating mechanism through which multicultural environments may either support or constrain the development of tolerance, depending on levels of access, institutionalisation, and resource distribution. These relationships between media education, cultural diversity, and spatial information environments are illustrated in Figure 1.

This study aimed to identify the key components and mechanisms for effectively implementing media education in a multicultural society, with a primary focus on school-based and broader societal contexts. The research objectives were to analyse normative-methodological documents and outline a list of competencies and principles recommended for integrating media literacy into school education; conduct a comparative analysis of countries as leaders in developed media education policies and study the intercultural tolerance of the population; and develop recommendations for the further implementation of media education in multicultural educational and societal environments.

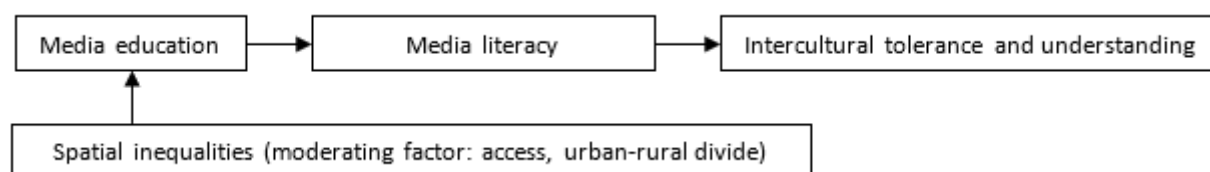


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Relationship between Media Education, Media Literacy Development, and Intercultural Tolerance in Spatial Contexts

Source: Created by the Authors

Methodological Design

The study employed a multi-method research design that integrated a theoretical-methodological review, a comparative analysis of European media education practices, and an empirical survey conducted in polyethnic regions of Ukraine. In

the first stage, a theoretical-methodological review was undertaken using official European policy documents, including the European Commission’s framework materials (Council of the European Union, 2018) and the *Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021–2027* (European Commission, 2021). These sources provided the conceptual foundations for

identifying key approaches to media education, intercultural dialogue, and media literacy development. Additional materials from international initiatives such as the DESTIN Project (2025) and Media Vista (2025) were analysed to capture practical models of implementation. The selection of sources was guided by their relevance to policy frameworks, institutional practices, and educational strategies within multicultural media literacy contexts.

A comparative analysis was then conducted across six countries—Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, France, Germany, and Sweden. Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary were selected due to regional proximity and comparable socio-cultural conditions, while France, Germany, and Sweden represent states with highly institutionalised media education systems. A structured comparative framework was applied, encompassing: (1) policy architectures; (2) the degree of institutional integration of media education; (3) curriculum structures and competency frameworks; (4) teacher training mechanisms; and (5) accessibility of media education initiatives.

Content analysis was performed on representative programmes and platforms. For Ukraine, Poland, and Hungary, this included the DESTIN project, the Polish National Audiovisual Institute (2025), the *School with Class* platform (School with Class Foundation, 2025), and the Hungarian National Public Education Portal (2025). For France, Germany, and Sweden, national policy frameworks and institutionalised media education models were examined through official documents and programme descriptions. Institutional coordination—such as the governance structures of DESTIN—was incorporated into the analysis. The content analysis followed a stepwise procedure: identification of key documents and programmes; coding according to predefined categories (policy support, competencies, teaching formats, target groups); and cross-country comparison. This approach enabled the identification of shared structural

patterns and national divergences in media education implementation.

To complement the document-based analysis, a survey was conducted in Ukrainian polyethnic regions. The sample comprised 112 respondents—school students and teachers from ethnically and culturally diverse areas. A stratified sampling strategy ensured representation across age groups and educational settings. The survey instrument consisted of structured questions assessing media literacy practices, attitudes toward intercultural communication, and exposure to media education initiatives. The questionnaire was reviewed by subject experts and piloted prior to administration. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, while open-ended responses were examined through thematic coding to identify recurring patterns in media use and perceptions of tolerance. The findings should be interpreted with caution due to the limited sample size, regional specificity, and reliance on self-reported data, which may constrain generalisability.

Quantitative and qualitative results were subsequently integrated to inform evidence-based recommendations for strengthening media education in Ukraine's multicultural schools.

Results

Analysis of Regulatory and Methodological Documents for Integrating Media Literacy into School Education

In multicultural societies, ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural groups coexist and interact, each bearing distinct historical traditions, value orientations, and communicative practices. This plurality enriches public discourse yet simultaneously generates risks of misunderstanding, prejudice, and conflict. Media education therefore assumes a pivotal role in cultivating citizens' capacity to critically interpret information and engage meaningfully in intercultural dialogue (Avramenko & Avramenko, 2025; Manchanda & Arora, 2026). Its foundations extend beyond the acquisition of skills for locating, evaluating, and

producing media content to encompass an understanding of how media and digital platforms shape social perceptions and reinforce stereotypes (UNESCO, 2025).

Within this framework, a tolerant information space may be conceptualised as an environment that guarantees equitable access to information and enables the expression of diverse viewpoints. Media education nurtures critical thinking and empathy, fostering the ability to recognise manipulation and engage with information in a reflective and responsible manner (Abdygalym et al., 2025; Diachuk, 2024; Rashimbetov et al., 2025). Its influence extends well beyond formal schooling, encompassing community-based initiatives, informal learning within social networks, and collaborative efforts among educational institutions, media organisations, and non-governmental actors.

Illustrative examples include the DESTIN project (2025), which integrates video lectures, role-playing simulations, and multilingual resources to promote intercultural exchange. These design features underscore a commitment to participatory and multilingual learning environments, though their effectiveness remains contingent upon learners' prior media literacy and access to educational resources. A comparable model is evident in the Media Vista project (2025), which combines national training sessions, online courses, and methodological guides to strengthen media literacy in regions characterised by ethnic diversity (Solomin et al., 2019). While such initiatives attempt to link pedagogical training with methodological support, their outcomes depend heavily on institutional continuity and resource availability. Collectively, these cases demonstrate that programme design alone cannot guarantee consistent results across varied sociocultural contexts.

The heterogeneity of sociocultural environments is reflected not only in demographic patterns but also in the persistence of stereotypes and informational asymmetries. Effective intercultural dialogue and the mitigation of hate speech require a systematic approach to media literacy that transcends purely skills-based

models (Ruban, 2022; Skorokhod et al., 2023). In many countries, inconsistent implementation of media education limits its capacity to challenge entrenched biases and foster inclusive communication. Formal adherence to political correctness does not necessarily correspond to actual levels of media literacy across social groups. These challenges intensified following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, as recent studies reveal increasing segmentation along ethnocultural lines and divergent interpretations of geopolitical events across European societies—indicators of uneven media literacy and public awareness.

For this reason, the effectiveness of Western European media literacy strategies must be interpreted with caution, and contemporary scholarship emphasises the need to critically reassess existing approaches rather than treat them as universally transferable models. The theoretical-methodological review therefore draws on foundational European policy documents, including the Council of the European Union's *Recommendation On Promoting Common Values, Inclusive Education, and the European Dimension of Teaching* (2018), and the European Commission's *Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021–2027*. Practical methodologies are reflected in the *MIL Compendium*, which explores the integration of digital technologies and critical thinking to support pluralism and freedom of expression, and in the *Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Teachers* (Wilson et al., 2024), which proposes modular structures incorporating simulations, multimedia tasks, and interdisciplinary case studies.

The structured sequencing of these modules — from knowledge acquisition to application and reflection illustrates how pedagogical design can support the development of critical and tolerant media practices. Nonetheless, their effectiveness remains dependent on contextual adaptation and the availability of adequately trained educators.

Among European initiatives, the DESTIN project occupies a distinctive place, offering media literacy courses developed by Ukrainian media

professionals within the broader framework of *Journalism Education for Democracy in Ukraine*. These courses aim to cultivate skills in analysing and critically interpreting information, assessing its credibility, identifying sources, and situating media content within political, social, commercial, and cultural contexts. By strengthening participants' ability to interpret media messages and recognise underlying value orientations, the programme equips users to protect themselves and others from misinformation. Participation requires registration, and feedback is collected upon completion to refine the educational materials. The emphasis on critical interpretation and contextual analysis contributes directly to the formation of informed, reflective media users. Notably, the courses were developed exclusively by Ukrainian teams and were not divided into modular units (DESTIN Project, 2025), a structural feature that may limit their flexibility and scalability across diverse educational settings.

The Media Vista initiative demonstrates a similarly multifaceted approach, resulting in a series of trainings, a monograph, and an interactive multimedia platform used in educational practice. The platform integrates theoretical and practical components that examine media coverage of the multi-ethnic information space. Its interdisciplinary design enables participants to connect media content with broader sociocultural processes, thereby enhancing intercultural awareness. Historical, ethnological, political science, linguistic, and related perspectives are woven together to provide a comprehensive analytical framework. The programme includes trainings, presentations, and masterclasses for young journalists, alongside lectures and seminars for wider audiences. Its overarching goal is to prepare journalists capable of working effectively in a multinational media environment and to strengthen understanding between ethnic groups. Participants are introduced to Ukraine's national communities, their characteristics, and their challenges, gaining insight into their role within society.

In Ukraine, media education initiatives centred on fact-checking have expanded rapidly in response to intensified disinformation and propaganda (Kengesbayeva et al., 2025; Avramenko et al., 2025). Prominent examples include StopFake (2025) and VoxCheck (2025), both of which emphasise verification practices and evidence-based analysis of public information. These initiatives help curb the spread of disinformation and promote analytical reasoning, although their reach and effectiveness vary across population groups. The Texty.org.ua project (2025) combines fact-checking with data journalism, fostering critical data interpretation skills among media users.

A significant component of Ukraine's media literacy landscape is the development of educational programmes such as Learn to Discern (L2D) by IREX (2025), which has been implemented in schools and universities, and courses offered by the Academy of Ukrainian Press for teachers and students. The integration of educational programmes with verification practices strengthens the applied dimension of media literacy, though long-term sustainability depends on continued institutional and financial support. Regional initiatives and analytical centres also contribute to this ecosystem. Detector Media (2025), for example, monitors journalistic quality, exposes covert propaganda, and conducts regional trainings for journalists. Together, these professional fact-checking platforms and educational programmes form a multilayered system for safeguarding the information environment, though effectiveness varies according to regional resource availability and audience engagement. This comprehensive approach represents a significant step toward enhancing societal resilience to manipulation, while underscoring the need for broader and more inclusive implementation.

In Poland, media literacy development is guided by two strategic documents: the *Digital Competences Development Strategy 2021–2025* issued by the Ministry of Digitalisation, which identifies media education as a core component of digital skills across all age groups, and the

National Media Education Programme 2019–2024 by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, which outlines goals ranging from recognising disinformation to creating social campaigns (European Commission, 2025a). Influential applied initiatives include the *School of Young Criticism* platform (2024) and the gamified *CyberSchool* course (2017). These programmes combine online modules, workshops, and gamified formats, though their optional nature limits systemic impact.

In Slovakia, media literacy is shaped by the Ministry of Education and the National Agency for Media Education. The *Digital Education Strategy until 2030* includes a dedicated section on media literacy with clear performance indicators and recommendations for educators (Ministry of Investment, Regional Development..., 2019). The *National Digital Skills Strategy of the Slovak Republic: Action Plan 2023–2026* emphasises intercultural dialogue and countering disinformation through cooperation with universities and local NGOs (Ministry of Investment..., 2025). Practical initiatives include the course *The Media and Me* by the Institute for Digital Education, where high school students analyse real news cases and learn fact-checking algorithms (Centre for Media Literacy, 2025). This reflects a structured effort to formalise media literacy within the education system and ensure consistent learning outcomes.

In Hungary, media education is administered jointly by the Ministry of Innovation and Technology and the Academy of Education. Among current initiatives, the hybrid *Media Workshop* course (2024) for teachers—combining online lectures with practical case-study analysis of advertising—has gained particular prominence. Students engage with the *Youth and Media* platform, completing interactive exercises and automated assessments via Moodle (Fiatalok a Nemzetért Alapítvány, 2023). At the same time, the integration of media education into state-influenced narratives raises concerns regarding its potential impact on the

development of independent critical thinking and intercultural tolerance.

In France, media education is coordinated by the Ministry of National Education in partnership with the Centre pour l'éducation aux médias et à l'information (CLEMI, 2025a), the national institution responsible for implementing media and information literacy. According to EMI Circular No. 2022-01, media education is embedded across all educational cycles and interdisciplinary projects, ensuring its systemic and comprehensive character (Ministry of National Education (France), 2022a; 2025). The national reference document for EMI standards (2015) outlines 27 key competencies for students from primary to upper secondary school, serving as a pedagogical benchmark (Ministry of National Education, 2024). CLEMI administers the *Parcours EMI* programme (Ministry of National Education, 2022b), comprising eight modules with lectures, project-based activities, and online assessments, and also operates radio workshops in more than 150 schools, where students produce radio programmes under professional mentorship (CLEMI, 2025b). For university-level teacher training, the SPOC course *EMI at University* is available in a mini-MOOC format (CLEMI, 2015). The compulsory and systematically structured nature of media education in France ensures consistent exposure across age groups, though implementation outcomes vary according to institutional conditions and pedagogical practices.

In Germany, media competency development is coordinated by the Federal Ministry of Education and regional (Länder) authorities. The *National Media Competence Strategy 2020* identifies five core areas, including education, youth protection, and scientific research (European Commission, 2023). The *DigitalPact School* programme (Federal Ministry..., 2025) supports media literacy initiatives through infrastructure modernisation and course development. The Youth Media Protection project (Hessian Ministry of Education..., 2025) offers accredited masterclasses for teenagers on digital safety and ethics. Teachers may complete the certified

Media Literate e-learning course provided by the Center for Youth Media Literacy (Elternarbeit Sachsen, 2025). The annual *Students Create Media* competition engages approximately 2,000 students in producing videos and podcasts evaluated by expert juries; one notable example is the Steglitz secondary school music ensemble, which adapted the legend of King Arthur into a musical (Berliner Morgenpost, 2020). This combination of national strategy and decentralised implementation affords flexibility but also results in uneven participation and varying levels of engagement across regions.

In Sweden, responsibility for media and information literacy lies with the Ministry of Culture and the National Agency for Education (2025), which jointly coordinate national programmes. Media education is implemented through state strategies and practical initiatives spanning both formal and non-formal education. The *National Media and Information Literacy Strategy 2018* emphasises partnerships with schools, libraries, and NGOs to ensure broad citizen engagement (Swedish Government, 2018). *Digital Competence in the Curriculum 2021–2025* integrates digital and media skills into compulsory schooling from the fourth grade (Swedish Government, 2025). The online platform *MIK-verktyg* provides ten mini-courses for students aged 10–18, integrated with Google Classroom (Swedish Media Authority, 2025). Teachers may enrol in a seven-week blended course combining offline sessions, online modules, and mentor support (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2025). The *Creative School* grant programme (Swedish Arts Council, 2025) funds interdisciplinary media-arts projects in schools. Strong institutional coordination and curricular integration underpin Sweden’s systemic and sustainable approach to media literacy, though outcomes vary according to local implementation conditions and resource availability. A comparative overview of these programmes is presented in Table 1.

Taken together, the comparison demonstrates that the effectiveness of media education in cultivating a tolerant information space is shaped by the degree of institutionalisation,

curricular integration, and pedagogical coherence. It also reveals a persistent gap between policy frameworks and their practical implementation, particularly in multicultural and resource-constrained contexts.

Assessment of Media Literacy Levels among Senior Secondary School Students in Comparison with Countries with Developed Media Education Policies

The analysis of media literacy strategies and curricula is inherently bound to the educational sphere, for it is through educational institutions that state policy on the development of critical thinking, digital competence, and intercultural dialogue is operationalised. Strategies articulate national priorities, methodological orientations, and long-term objectives for advancing media education, while curricula translate these provisions into concrete pedagogical content—whether through dedicated school subjects, integrated modules, or specialised interdisciplinary courses.

Within the educational environment, students acquire practical skills in analysing, interpreting, and evaluating media content, thereby cultivating the capacity to participate responsibly in democratic life and to engage tolerantly within multicultural settings. In this sense, education functions not merely as a site of knowledge transmission but as a formative space where media literacy becomes embedded in everyday communicative practice.

Table 1 presents a comparative analysis of media literacy strategies and curricula across selected European countries, highlighting their structural features, core content components, and varying degrees of integration into national education systems. This comparison underscores how institutional design and curricular coherence shape the effectiveness of media literacy initiatives in fostering a tolerant and inclusive information environment.

The comparative analysis of media education strategies and practical programmes across six European countries reveals both shared approaches and significant divergences, offering valuable insights for refining the Ukrainian

model. In France, media education constitutes a compulsory component of the national curriculum, spanning primary to upper-secondary levels and guided by a clearly articulated set of 27 competencies outlined in the national EMI framework (Ministry of National Education, 2024). This ensures a systemic, interdisciplinary, and consistently implemented approach (CLEMI, 2025). Sweden demonstrates a similar level of institutionalisation: media education is embedded within the national curriculum and supported through coordinated standards issued by the Ministry of Culture and the National Agency for Education (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2023).

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of Media Literacy Strategies and Curricula				
Country	Strategies (year, key emphases)	Programmes (name, format, audience)	Assessment	Platforms/Tools
Poland	2021-2025: digital competence framework with a Media literacy block; 2019-2024: integration of media education	School of Media Criticism (online, 13-18 y.o.) Youth in the media (offline, Virtual Reality (VR) workshops); CyberSchool (online, gamified modules)	Automated tests, practical exercises	Mediaportal platform, VR studios
Slovakia	until 2030: digital literacy in schools; 2023-2026: intercultural dialogue, combating disinformation	Media and me (online, 16-19 y.o.) We learn media (online, teachers); Media lab (offline, youth leaders)	Course certification, participant feedback	E-learning platform, camps
Hungary	2021-2027: Media literacy block in digital strategy; 2018-2023: partnership models with NGOs	Media Workshop (online+offline, teachers); Youth and media (online, 14- 18 y.o.) Médiaémbresztő (video, broad audience)	Tests, projects	Moodle, YouTube, hybrid meetings
France	2022: EMI (Media and Information Education) circular for all educational cycles; 2015: 27 student EMI competences	CLEMI Parcours (online+offline, 10-15 y.o.) EMI at university (SPOC, students); Ateliers Radio (offline, school studios)	Online tests on Éduscol, student projects	Éduscol portal, MOOC platforms, radio studios
Germany	2020: five priorities of media competence; 2019-2024: sub-grants	DigitalPact Youth media protection (workshops, 12-16 y.o.) Media literate (e-learning, teachers); students create media (competition programme for pupils)	Jury evaluation, certification	Webinars, competition platforms
Sweden	2018: institutional partnership; 2021-2025: compulsory MIK (Media and Information Literacy) in curriculum	MIK-verktyg (online, 10-18 y.o.) Teacher Training media (flexible mode, teachers); Creative school – media (grants, interdisciplinary projects in schools)	Agency certification, internal tests	Google Classroom, state grants

Source: Created by the Authors based on Berliner Morgenpost (2020), Federal Ministry of Education and Research (2025), Elterngarbit Sachsen (2025), Ministry of National Education (France) (2022a, 2024), CLEMI (2015, 2025b), MAX7 (2025), Swedish National Agency for Education (2025), Filiciak et al. (2010), European Commission (2023, 2025a), Media Workshop (2024), Centre for Media Literacy (2025), Fiatalok a Nemzetért Alapítvány (2023), Ministry of Investment, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic (2019, 2023), Swedish Government (2018, 2025), Swedish Arts Council (2025), School of Young Criticism (2024), Hessian Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs (2025), Swedish Media Authority (2025).

By contrast, Poland situates media education within a broader digital competence agenda, delivered largely through optional programmes such as the National Audiovisual Institute’s *Media Education* initiative (2025) and the *School with Class* platform (School with Class Foundation, 2025). This optional status limits its reach and systemic impact. In Slovakia and Hungary, media education likewise remains non-compulsory, typically incorporated as an additional module within digital literacy frameworks. In Hungary, concerns have been raised that state-level narratives may shape the orientation of media education content, potentially influencing the development of independent critical thinking (National Public Education Portal, 2025). Germany adopts an intermediate model: media literacy is embedded within a nationwide digital strategy, and the *DigitalPact School* programme (Federal Ministry..., 2025) provides sub-grants for infrastructure modernisation and course development, although participation by educational institutions remains voluntary.

Across all countries, practical initiatives—workshops, online courses, competitions, and project-based activities—play a central role in engaging young audiences. Yet these initiatives vary markedly in scale, format, and resource provision, reflecting differing levels of state support. Their contributions to youth media literacy are evident, though outcomes remain uneven and their transferability to other contexts, including Ukraine, requires careful adaptation. Assessment methods also differ: Poland and Hungary rely on direct tests and automated tasks; Slovakia and Sweden employ certification through external platforms; France and Germany favour project-based evaluations and expert juries. This diversity highlights a spectrum of approaches that may inform Ukrainian practice, ranging from compulsory core programmes with defined competencies to gamified asynchronous exercises, expert-led workshops, and grant-supported interschool initiatives. Their implementation, however, must align with national priorities and resource capacities.

The survey conducted in Ukrainian polyethnic regions (n = 112) complements the comparative analysis by illuminating local media literacy practices and attitudes toward intercultural interaction. The results indicate that 68% of respondents regularly engage with online media for educational or informational purposes, and 61% consciously verify information across multiple sources. Nonetheless, 43% reported difficulties in identifying manipulative or biased content, particularly within social media environments. Regarding intercultural communication, 72% expressed positive attitudes toward cultural diversity, while 38% acknowledged encountering stereotypes or biased representations of ethnic groups in media. Notably, 46% reported that school-based or informal media education activities had influenced their perceptions of other cultural groups, suggesting a meaningful link between media literacy and tolerance formation.

Despite these encouraging tendencies, the findings reveal inconsistencies: awareness of media influence is relatively high, yet practical critical-evaluation skills remain uneven, especially among younger respondents and those in regions with limited access to structured media education. Overall, media literacy in Ukrainian polyethnic regions appears to be developing but fragmented—a pattern consistent with countries where media education lacks full institutionalisation, such as Poland and Hungary.

Content analysis of key media education platforms in Ukraine, Poland, and Hungary further clarifies their distinctive features and implementation scales. In Ukraine, the DESTIN project—one of the largest international initiatives supported by Erasmus+—offers more than 20 interactive modules on media literacy, critical thinking, and information analysis. Its user base includes students, teachers, and school pupils, though access remains concentrated in major urban centres, leaving rural regions underserved (DESTIN Project, 2025). In Poland, the National Audiovisual Institute’s *Media Education* programme (2025) comprises over 15 modules and reaches more

than 3,000 institutions, while the *School with Class* platform engages approximately 5,000 schools and 40,000 teachers. Despite this extensive reach, the optional nature of these programmes limits their systemic impact. Hungary's National Public Education Portal (2025) provides over 10,000 educational materials and participates in the European *Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition* (European Commission, 2025b), which unites more than 600 organisations. Yet nationally oriented narratives in Hungarian media education materials may affect the development of independent critical thinking and intercultural understanding.

The comparative analysis highlights several structural challenges: unequal access to technical resources, qualified educators, and high-quality materials—particularly between urban and rural regions; the absence of mandatory media literacy components in curricula, resulting in fragmented implementation; shortages of specialised trainers and methodologists; and, in Hungary, the presence of politically oriented narratives that may shape students' interpretive frameworks. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive strategy encompassing infrastructure expansion, programme standardisation, enhanced teacher training, and the safeguarding of political neutrality in educational content. Only through such measures can Ukraine's multicultural society cultivate a robust, independent, and critically engaged media culture.

Discussion

The analysis demonstrates that effective media education is closely associated with the development of critical thinking among media users, their capacity to identify manipulative techniques, and the cultivation of empathy and respect for cultural diversity (Peña-Acuña et al., 2025; Zelenov, 2024). These conclusions resonate with the findings of Akbar et al. (2022), who observed that the integration of moral and media education significantly reduces intolerance in the context of globalisation. The present study similarly indicates that embedding

media education approaches within curricula contributes to the formation of values of tolerance and mutual respect among young people. Islam's (2024) research on multicultural education further supports this claim, noting that adequate media coverage of multicultural issues, combined with strengthened media literacy competencies, can foster a more tolerant information environment.

At the same time, the results reveal persistent challenges linked to unequal access to high-quality media education across social groups, echoing the conclusions of Mariyono (2024), who emphasised the need for context-sensitive approaches that account for local cultural mosaics. The findings of the present study therefore suggest that without targeted and differentiated strategies, media education may not consistently achieve its intended outcomes in fostering tolerance.

The practical dimension of media education, particularly its intersection with digital literacy, aligns with the work of Japar et al. (2023), who demonstrated that digital competencies are essential for the effective reception of multicultural values through media. While the present study confirms this relationship, it also highlights an additional outcome: media education contributes not only to tolerance formation but also to developing a more active civic orientation among information users. This observation corresponds with the findings of Arfaton et al. (2025), who showed that multicultural education fosters character traits oriented toward tolerance and mutual respect. The present data indicate the potential effectiveness of such approaches, although their impact remains contingent on contextual conditions.

Despite generally positive trends, certain aspects of tolerance within media education programmes remain insufficiently developed. Nafisah et al. (2024) emphasised the complexity of religious education's influence on interreligious tolerance, underscoring the need to incorporate religious and cultural contexts more deeply into media education. This insight aligns with the present study's observation that

media education strategies must be adapted to the religious composition of multicultural communities. Fernando et al. (2023) similarly argued that tolerance-building in post-conflict regions requires active engagement with media education tools, as media can serve as a platform for constructive dialogue between cultural groups. Findings from the Media Vista project reinforce this perspective, demonstrating that media can facilitate intercultural understanding, although this effect is uneven and mediated by access to educational resources. The present study places greater emphasis on institutional support and equitable access—factors less explicitly addressed in the cited literature.

The broader European context also provides important insights. Mikelatou and Arvanitis (2019) questioned the effectiveness of integration policies in the European Union, noting that despite numerous tolerance-oriented programmes, issues of inequality and ethnic isolation persist in countries such as France, Germany, and Sweden. Their conclusions highlight the need for more flexible, context-responsive strategies that engage local communities. This perspective challenges overly optimistic interpretations of media education, suggesting that its positive effects may coexist with broader processes of social fragmentation. In contrast, Ormond and Vietti (2022) criticised superficial approaches to tolerance and advocated for interactive educational formats—such as thematic excursions—to deepen understanding of multiculturalism. Their findings align with those of Pradanna and Abdulkarim (2023), who emphasised the role of social media in strengthening multicultural tolerance by fostering conscious engagement with cultural diversity.

The present study similarly interprets media education as both an informational resource and a mechanism for social integration, though its effectiveness appears conditional on institutional support and accessibility. These conclusions correspond with the work of Ragnarsdóttir et al. (2020), who found that media-integrated educational initiatives

enhance tolerance and reduce stereotypes among Icelandic youth. Scharrer and Zhou (2022) likewise highlighted the importance of educational programmes aimed at developing critical media analysis skills, including the recognition of fake news and manipulative content.

Santos (2024) further supported the role of media education in sustaining intercultural communication, emphasising the media's capacity to disseminate cosmopolitan ideas and promote social harmony. Similar conclusions were drawn by Sipayung and Dwiningrum (2020), whose research demonstrated that media-supported multicultural education strengthens social cohesion among students of diverse ethnic backgrounds. Sopian et al. (2023) likewise found that digital initiatives aimed at fostering religious tolerance enhance openness and intercultural understanding among children.

Taken together, these studies suggest that media education can serve as a powerful complementary mechanism for fostering tolerance. Yet only under conditions of institutional integration, equitable access, and context-sensitive implementation. The present findings reinforce this conclusion, highlighting both the transformative potential of media education and the structural constraints that shape its outcomes.

Recommendations for the Further Implementation of Media Education in Ukraine's Multicultural Schools

The further development of media education in Ukraine's multicultural schools must take into account the identified challenges of uneven access and fragmented implementation. A mandatory foundational component should be incorporated into state educational standards, defining core competencies in the critical analysis and creation of media content, as well as the ability to recognise and counter manipulative techniques and hostile discourse. This component must be sensitive to the linguistic and cultural diversity of Ukraine's regions; educational materials should therefore be translated and adapted for Hungarian, Romanian, Crimean Tatar, and other minority

communities, thereby broadening participation and ensuring equitable access to knowledge.

A subsequent priority is the systematic preparation of teachers and methodologists. This includes organising certification-based training aligned with CLEMI standards, integrating established European practices into professional development courses, and conducting regular supervision sessions with international experts. Such measures will enhance the quality of facilitation in group discussions, role-playing exercises, and multimedia-based learning.

To address the documented lack of access to practical media education resources in certain regions, the establishment of regional media centre-laboratories—developed in partnership with local universities and NGOs—should be considered. These centres would allow students not only to study theoretical foundations but also to produce radio and video materials on assigned topics, thereby strengthening applied media literacy skills.

Given the observed inconsistencies in students' media literacy competencies, flexible learning formats must be complemented by a clear and diversified assessment system. Digital tests with automated feedback, project-based assignments, and external certification through national platforms may serve as effective tools. Annual monitoring of media literacy and tolerance levels—particularly in light of the variability revealed in survey results—will enable timely identification of bottlenecks and informed programme adjustments.

Attention should also be directed toward interschool and interregional initiatives, which respond to the need for broader engagement and practical application of media literacy skills. The involvement of local communities and parents is essential, as support for extracurricular media activities fosters an environment in which tolerance and critical thinking are perceived as shared social values rather than merely curricular objectives (Polityka & Dvornyk-Kozachinska, 2025; Yesmaganbet & Kairbekov, 2025).

Finally, to ensure the sustainability of these reforms, media education initiatives must be integrated into regional education development strategies, with dedicated budget lines allocated within local education departments. Coordinated efforts among state institutions, schools, universities, and civil society organisations—combined with regular monitoring and transparent reporting—can contribute to the formation of a more tolerant, resilient, and inclusive information space in Ukraine's multicultural regions.

Conclusion

The study indicates that the integration of media education modules into school practice can meaningfully enhance students' capacity for critical information analysis and foster deeper intercultural understanding. A comparative examination of European approaches allows several substantive conclusions to be drawn. The findings demonstrate that media education constitutes a significant factor in shaping a more tolerant information environment across multicultural societies such as Ukraine, Poland, Hungary, France, Germany, and Sweden. In Ukraine, the DESTIN project contributed to the development of critical thinking and bias-recognition skills among students, which was associated with a decline in the reproduction of stereotypes concerning national minorities.

In Poland and Hungary, despite the presence of media education initiatives, their effectiveness was constrained by the elective nature of courses and, in Hungary's case, by the instrumentalisation of media education to reinforce nationalist narratives. By contrast, France and Sweden have embedded media education within compulsory curricula supported by clearly articulated standards, enabling a more systematic and coherent approach to cultivating tolerance. Germany represents an intermediary model, combining national digital strategies with sub-grant funding and a strong emphasis on youth protection in digital environments. Across all countries, persistent inequalities in access to high-quality media education resources were identified,

complicating efforts to create a unified and inclusive information space. These findings suggest that the effective cultivation of tolerance requires a comprehensive strategy attentive not only to educational content and accessibility but also to political neutrality and socio-cultural context.

On the basis of these results, several practical recommendations emerge. Core media literacy competencies should be integrated into national educational standards, accompanied by mandatory diagnostic testing at the beginning and end of the course. Future research would benefit from combining quantitative surveys with in-depth interviews involving teachers and parents, as well as systematic analysis of student-produced media projects. Longitudinal tracking of the same participants over multiple years would allow for an assessment of the durability of media literacy and tolerance outcomes. Strengthening continuity between school and higher education—through specialised training programmes for educators and media professionals—would further support the systematic development of media literacy as an academic and civic discipline.

If you want, I can also craft a concise journal-ready conclusion, a policy brief, or a synthesised conceptual model that integrates these insights into your broader manuscript.

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Ethical Approval



UZHGOROD NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

ETHICS APPROVAL

The Research Ethics Council of the University reviewed the scientific research article titled "The role of media education in forming a tolerant information space in multicultural societies." Upon voting, the Council issued a positive decision, confirming that the study complies with the ethical requirements of the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and its later amendments. Permission to conduct the research in its current form was granted under Approval No. 421018.

CHAIRMAN OF
THE RESEARCH
ETHICS
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Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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AI Use Statement

AI was used solely to assist with minor language corrections and stylistic improvements. The authors critically reviewed all AI-generated

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Author Contribution Statement

YB, YS conceived the ideas of the study; HH, LRB conceived the ideas for the analysis; YB, NT, YS performed the analyses; YB, NT wrote the manuscript; YS, HH, and LRB were major contributors in writing the manuscript, and all other authors commented on the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.