

***Integrating mindfulness in media literacy:  
A culture-responsive training programme for older Thai adults***



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**ABSTRACT**

Media literacy is a much-needed competency in the digitalised world, but it is still an unknown knowledge base for older Thai adults. This design-based research set out as an initiative to promote media literacy through an age-friendly and culture-responsive training programme. The design process involved focus groups with key stakeholders and older adult 'learners' as well as field observations. This type of research work, in the Thai context, revealed the primacy of integrating media literacy learning with the Buddhist practice of mindfulness. It also highlighted the importance of incorporating certain cultural values and practices - collectivism, a sense of enjoyment, beliefs about the supernatural - into any media literacy programme particularly aimed at older Thais. The findings provide significant insight into the ways in which media literacy - especially as it has developed in a Western context - has to be thoughtfully integrated into specifically located everyday practices and cultural perspectives.

**Keywords:** *culture-responsive programme, media literacy, mindfulness, older people.*



## INTRODUCTION

The profound demographic transition in Thailand has placed the country as the third most rapidly aging population in the world, and the second-most aged in Southeast Asia (HelpAge Asia, n.d.; Thai Gerontology Research and Development Institute, 2020). The country is also considered to have attained the status of a complete aged society as its aging population has already reached 20 percent and is projected to reach 28 percent by 2031 and 33 percent by 2040 (United Nation, 2019). This demographic change has raised major concerns about the multifaceted impacts on economic growth and social security as Thailand is “getting old before getting rich” (World Bank, 2016, p. 9). More recent attention is being paid to how to help older adults cope with and adapt to living in an environment of social change, notably how to empower them to deal with the increasing pervasiveness of digitalised media.

Surveys dealing with media habits of Thailand’s older population have revealed that in 2019, people aged 60 and over spent 1-4 hours per day watching television and using social media (National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission, 2019). In 2020 older Thais were spending an average of 4.31 hours per day watching television and approximately 8.41 hours per day on social media (Electronic Transactions Development Agency, 2020; Eukeik, 2020). This increase in media consumption parallels the growing number of older people negatively affected by the media. Recent surveys on the impact of media use among older Thais have revealed that in 2021, 16 percent, and in the following year, 22 percent admitted to having been victimized through various media formats (Doungphummes et al., 2023). The aging population has also been reported to disproportionately be both spreaders and victims of fake news due to limited skills in media and online usage, and this has led to loss of life savings, legal and health complications, conflicts within family and community, humiliation, and depression (Kleechaya, 2021; Phanmool & Propunprom, 2021).

While such trends indicate the significance and urgency of building older adults’ media literacy competency, scholarly work on this segment of the population is still limited as most media literacy-related research in Thailand has focused on children and youths (Suttisima, et al., 2020). Additionally, state agencies (such as Department of Older Persons, Non-formal Education Department) have yet to include skill building

around media literacy specifically directed to older adults in Thailand. Recognising this gap, a design-based research initiative was devised specifically with a focus on developing an effective media literacy training programme to build these much-needed skills for the older Thai. We argue that of particular concern was the need to design an age-friendly and culturally responsive programme which could incorporate and connect older adults’ cultural predispositions and outlooks with what might be called the ‘Western’ media literacy ‘trajectory’. This paper points out how an epistemology of cultural proximity was incorporated to make our media literacy training programme meaningful and relevant to the lifestyles of older Thais, how it leads to the creation of praxis pedagogy conducive to a practice of media literacy in daily life, and how the ‘culturally responsive knowing’ of the researchers (Doungphummes & Vicars, 2020, p. 210) becomes important in the design process. It also unpacks the decolonisation of ‘Western’ media literacy, i.e., the researcher’s ability to challenge the uncritical adoption of the dominant ‘Western’ media literacy epistemology and axiology of universal validity and to question its application to a non-Western society like Thailand (Glück, 2018) that occurs through the cultural contextualisation of the programme design.

### Media literacy for older adults in the Thai context

In Thailand, notions of media literacy have been taken up in tertiary education since the 1970s, with a broad focus on promoting students’ understanding of cultural power, i.e., relations between media organisations and government policies, and media messages as constructed realities (Langer & Doungphummes, 2009). Thai scholars’ interest in media literacy has grown over an increasing concern about the influences of digitalised media power on people’s consciousness and interactions in daily life. More studies on epistemological and pedagogical aspects of media literacy and efforts to drive it in the basic and higher education sectors have intensified (Suttisima et al., 2020). Such efforts allow for systematic instruction in media literacy skills for children and youths through formal education, instigated by UNESCO (Thailand) in collaboration with the Thai Ministry of Education, and the National Broadcasting and Telecommunication Commission’s plan to include media literacy teaching as mandatory in the primary education curriculum (Nupairoj, 2013). Moreover, the general view that

younger generations as digital natives can be easily exposed to harmful content (such as pornography, harsh language, identity fraud, and violence) through digital devices and applications has reinforced the priority of promoting media literacy to this age group over other age cohorts, including older adults.

Most of the earlier work adopted the traditional concept of media literacy which refers to one's ability to access, analyse, evaluate, and create media in a variety of forms as a research framework (Jolls, 2008), but recent studies have incorporated either notions of information or digital literacy, or both as an investigative approach. UNESCO's definition of media and information literate citizens (Muratova et al., 2019) has often been used as conceptual starting points for research on media literacy in Thailand. Notably, while the dimensions of media production and content creation were often part of the media literacy framework found in most studies focusing on children and youths (e.g., Kleechaya, 2016; Tansuwannond, 2015; Wiroonrapun & Anunthavorasakul 2016), these practices were rarely applied in research relating to media literacy programmes aimed at older adults (e.g., Bhibulbhanuvat, et al., 2020; Kerdyoo, 2015; Kleechaya, 2014).

In Thailand it appears to be the case that media literacy programmes have been conceptualised to suit the aging population in terms that generally suggest that this demographic had a somewhat lower level of 'critical autonomy' (Masterman, 1985, p. 24) and of digital media knowledge than those of younger age groups (Kleechaya, 2021; Sap-in & Khaoroptham, 2017).

While the application and instructional methods of encouraging media literacy used with young populations have been diverse - for example, some were linked to civic education, or to notions of an inclusive and democratic society (Doungphummes & Saengsingkaew, 2020; Wiroonrapun & Anunthavorasakul 2016) - these are scant in the case of older adults. This is in contrast to the increasing use of media and digital platforms among this age group and the negative effects of media on older Thais' well-being (Doungphummes et al., 2022; Kleechaya, 2021; Phanmool & Propunprom, 2021). This situation clearly generates even more so than in the past, a need to empower Thailand's aged population with media literacy skills. One way that this can be achieved is to create media literacy programmes that can motivate and foster the practice of media literacy among the older Thai. Such programmes can be implemented through the existing body of 'schools for senior citizens' which has

been established in 2,049 communities across the country (Department of Older Persons, 2023). The 'school' here is used in a loose sense as it is basically operated as a club providing a space for older people in each community to get together and learn a topic of their choice once or twice a week.

### **Factors relating to learning of older Thais**

In developing a media literacy training programme that can motivate older Thais to participate, it is important the programme enhances their ability to 'make sense of the to-be-learned material' and to meaningfully relate it to their quality of life (Ohsako, 2002, p. 200). This requires an understanding of the older adult's life both in the aspect of aging and cultural characteristics as these will inevitably inform their learning preferences and the ways in which they will engage in the learning process (Merriam & Kee, 2014). Major age-related changes, including the decline in physical mobility - slowness and onset of fatigue during tasks (Glass, 1996), vision changes - contrast sensitivity, scotopic processing, and visual processing speed - and hearing deficits - auditory sensitivity, temporal processing, and spatial localisation (Peelle, 2020), could play a part in the learning and participation of older adults. A slowing of cognitive processes and the diminution of working memory function makes it difficult for older people to learn new material (Wolfson, et al., 2014).

While certain aging changes condition older adults' learning abilities, cultural characteristics shape their learning preferences and styles as well (Merriam and Kee 2014; Ohsako 2002). Among the most important cultural values that have permeated the life of the older generations in Thailand are Buddhist teachings, superstition, collectivism, and 'sanuk' culture, as these values were pervasive in the cultural environment in which they grew up (Klaussner, 2002).

To elaborate, the simplest practice underlying the Buddhist goal of living a 'noble life' is 'mindfulness', commonly known as 'sati', a Pali term used to describe a mental factor that signifies attentiveness to the present and awareness of reality (Bodhi, 2011). Payutto (1995) explained that mindfulness is a tool that helps human beings to be conscious, and not get lost in emotions or biases that arise unconsciously. Apart from Buddhism, the Thai's superstitious practices are influential in their decisions and actions in various aspects of life, including risk-taking and purchasing behaviours, fatalistic

attitude, and safety protection (Jackson, 2016; Chinchanchokchai, 2017). The ethics of collectivism is also a predominant cultural value, which entails the idea of togetherness that adheres to the comfort of working in groups, often in a way that creates joy or 'sanuk' and this includes educational contexts (Hofstede, 2011; Klaussner, 2002).

Particularly to older adult learners, 'sanuk' is arguably the most important element that can motivate their participation in the learning process, as they generally perceive that (academic) learning is not a priority at the life stage of old age, i.e., they do not have to endure it if it is to put them in a stressful situation (Bhibulbhanuvat et al., 2020). 'Sanuk' is also a distinct cultural trait underpinned by the fun-loving approach to life that intrinsically shapes the way Thai people live their lives and is a respite and release from tensions and pressures (Dounghummes & Vicars, 2020; Klaussner, 2002).

## METHODS

This study employed a design-based research (DBR) approach which focused on the course design process - identifying, evaluating, applying changes and modifications to the created course, making a link between theoretical models and practical outcomes, and seeking the participation of stakeholders involved in the study (Vaezi et al., 2019).

The DBR also allowed the application of different methods that helped the researchers understand factors involved in the course design and the influence of these factors on the implementation of the course. The overall design of the media literacy training programme for older Thais adopted a DBR process (Jan et al., 2010), consisting of three stages: 1) designing the content and pedagogy of the training programme; 2) implementing a pilot version of the programme in five schools for seniors; and 3) evaluating and refining the programme design based on the pilot results.

Particular attention was paid to the input of stakeholders and older adults as their views were instrumental in connecting media literacy to the actual learning practice and environment of the older learner. Notably, the research obtained IRB approval through Mahidol University (MUSSIRB No. 2019/295 - B1).

### First stage: Content and pedagogy design

The first stage focusing on the design of contents and pedagogies consisted of two steps. First, an analysis of media literacy concepts adopted in Thai media education, practical media literacy interventions, and factors influencing the learning of older people was conducted through a review of academic literature and existing studies, particularly our previous research results on promoting media literacy to Thailand's older adults (see Bhibulbhanuvat et al., 2020). The result of this analysis was then used to formulate the contents and pedagogies of the media literacy training programme. Second, stakeholder's views on the drafted contents and pedagogies, and how to make the programme relevant and meaningful to older Thais were gathered through two focus groups.

The first focus group consisted of eleven experts (S1-S11) in adult learning education, media literacy education for older adults and media literacy skill development. The second focus group conducted with six experts (S12-S17) in aging and older adults, adult learning education, health promotion for media literacy, media literacy promotion, and a president of a subdistrict administrative organisation responsible for older adult education (S18) and a manager and a teacher working in schools for older adults (S19).

Prior to each focus group, the proposed programme was sent to the participants. Each focus group lasted 90-120 minutes, with the first one being conducted in November 2019 and the second in December 2019. Audio recording, note-taking, and observation were used for both sessions.

### Second stage: Implementing a pilot version

The second stage was implementing a pilot version of a six-hour media literacy training programme with 63 elderly students (aged 60 and older) at five schools for the senior; all the students were practising Buddhists. Each school was located in a different region of Thailand - north, northeast, central, southern, and the major urban hub, Bangkok - to ensure the applicability of the programme for older people with diverse geographical, educational, and socio-cultural backgrounds.

The implementation process took one and a half days for each school - three topics on the first day (3.5 hours) and two on the second day (2.5 hours). The demographic details of the participants are summarised below.

Table 1. *Backgrounds of participants*

School location	Number of participants	Gender	Age range	Education level
Bangkok	13 (E1-E13)	10 females 3 males	66-84	Primary school (3) Secondary school (6) Vocational certificate (1) Undergraduate degree (3)
North	8 (E14-E21)	6 females 2 males	60-76	Primary school (2) Secondary school (2) Undergraduate degree (2) Graduate degree (2)
Northeast	15 (E22-E36)	15 females	60-77	Secondary school (2) Vocational certificate (4) Undergraduate degree (9)
South	12 (E37-E48)	10 females 2 males	60-73	Primary school (4) Secondary school (4) Vocational certificate (2) Undergraduate degree (2)
Central	15 (E49-E63)	9 females 6 males	62-75	Primary school (7) Secondary school (1) Vocational certificate (1) Undergraduate degree (6)

### Third stage: Programme evaluation

The last stage was the evaluation of the programme based on the five focus groups (varying from 8-15 participants) conducted after the delivery of the programme was completed at each school, and observations during the delivery process. The focus groups and observations were focused on aspects of suitability, understandability, and applicability of the programme. During this process, the researchers' cultural 'insiderness' and knowledge that emerged out of the practices became an important factor in interpreting the data. The results from this evaluation were then used to refine and finalise the programme design.

### Data analysis

The findings of the academic literature review and the results of the two focus groups of stakeholders were first analysed and thematised as a starting point of the programme design process.

The five focus groups of elderly participants were analysed in conjunction with the observational data. They were then thematised according to two core strands of the programme - content and pedagogy. Identities of all participants were anonymised using of

S1-S19 for the stakeholders, and E1-E63 for the older adults.

## FINDINGS

### Existing knowledge and experience

The findings from the literature review indicate that existing studies relevant to media literacy of older people have been rooted in distinctly 'Western' notions of media literacy including the skills of accessing, analysing, evaluating, and creating media in a variety of forms (Kerdyoo, 2015; Kleechaya, 2014). However, our previous project revealed that in Thailand, older participants were unfamiliar with the concept of media literacy and importantly their willingness to take part in the learning was conditional on their being a relaxed atmosphere in the learning environment and also a sense of enjoyment attached to the learning process (Bhibulbhanuvat et al., 2020).

Older people capacity to relate media literacy, their past and present experiences of media encounters were also critical. It was also found that although the learning programme increased the participants' media literacy competencies, their average competency score was still in the moderate range with the lowest score on what was considered to be their analytical skills with regard to media content.

## Stakeholders' views of programme content and pedagogy

The existing knowledge and our past research set the parameters for the development of a media literacy training programme for older adults in this project. Given the diversity of the older Thai's media exposure and their moderate level of media literacy even after participating in the learning programme, it became clear that building the fundamental skill of 'reading information' received from all forms of media should be a major goal. This goal was reaffirmed by stakeholders' opinions. One stakeholder participant stated that 'The drafted programme is on the right track as it focuses on information literacy, an essential skill for older people to maintain their independence' (S1). Another participant emphasised that 'Older people in rural and urban areas use different types of media, so it is important the programme accommodates the development of mainstream, alternative, and online media literacy' (S2).

The stakeholders also raised the importance of locating any media literacy training in terms of certain Thai cultural reference frameworks, particularly the Buddhist mindfulness (*sati*). 'Sati' encompasses the practice of 'observation or watchfulness towards one own experience' – the lucid awareness of each present condition one encounters in life (Bodhi, 2011, p. 25). It serves as a gatekeeper that helps prevent us from acting upon an impulse, instead conducting life and actions with consciousness (Payutto, 1995). As one stakeholder stated: 'The main cause of falling under the media influence is the lack of *sati*' (S3). Linking the mindful facet to the critical element of media literacy, according to the stakeholders, would create a more holistic approach to the course as it could direct an already culturally located predisposition of the awareness of one's own actions and skill of critical questioning and evaluation towards media.

In terms of pedagogy, our proposed use of an activity-based approach was seen as being suitable as it could engage older adults in the learning process, which in effect, would enhance their cognitive ability. Notably, the activity had to be enjoyable, dynamic, and easy to participate in, as suggested by one participant who noted, 'Teaching media literacy to old people is effective when using activities that are fun, repeatable, and easy to take part in' (S6). The fun or 'sanuk' element was thus central to the delivery of our media literacy content to the older adult learner.

## Content (re)design: The interconnectedness of mindfulness and critical engagement

The result of these focus groups reaffirmed that it was necessary to add the concept of Buddhist mindfulness (*sati*) to the practice of media literacy. This led us to reconceptualise media literacy competency for older Thai adults and restructure the programme content based on the concept, which was translated to mean non-impulsive behaviours towards media stimulated-enticements. Such behaviours can be cultivated through the practice of self-restraint, i.e., holding back a decision to give oneself time to attend to one's own desires created by a media message at that present moment and examine whether the desire is just pseudo. Being mindful of one's own desire here is a kind of 'self-literacy' that functions as a gateway and a stepping stone for the following process of critical engagement with the received message. The critical engagement aspect was focused on developing the skill of 'reading information' - critical questioning media messages as well as evaluating the possible effects of these messages on their own and others' lives. Building these critical skills was seen as crucial for Thailand's aging media users enabling them to 'read media with meaning and understanding' (Alcalá, 2014, p. 177) and 'develop independent judgments about media content' (Silverblatt, 2001, p. 2). With this in mind, the content of the programme was then divided into two 'strands': the critical questioning of media messages, and the connection between mindfulness and media effects.

*Critical questioning of media messages.* The content concerning critical questioning of media texts incorporated the topic of how media technologies and productions construct realities and shape audience' perceptions. For example, the first session provided one deep fake video clip of a well-known and respected Thai monk, which was used as a case study for explaining the way that deep fake technology operates. The video had a powerful impact on the participants. Many had already seen it and they were able to vividly recall it during a discussion about the manipulative possibilities of digitally sophisticated online media. As one participant explained: 'The monk clip always reminds me of not believing everything I watch on TV or YouTube' (E1). Importantly, the participants considered this session 'eye-opening' (E15) and realised that they 'cannot always believe what is so believable' (E37).

Another session focused on how a television commercial is produced and why audiences are drawn

to the advertised product or service. The concept of ‘half-truth’ was introduced and discussion revolved around how television advertising would present only carefully chosen positive aspects of the product or service to encourage consumer purchases. This knowledge helped the participants understand why they were often drawn to a particular advertised product. As one participant explained: ‘I realise now why I often buy a product telling me it can ease my joint pain’ (E50).

*Mindfulness and media effects.* One part of the training programme, which lasted an hour used as a jump off point, the concepts of ‘selective exposure’ (Klapper, 1960) and ‘confirmation bias’ (Festinger, 1962) to explain why an individual might gravitate towards a particular form of media and media content. The aim here was to make programme participants consciously aware of their selective inclinations and this kind of awareness could prevent media prompted-actions. As one participant explained: ‘It has never crossed my mind why I like watching dramatic events from channel 3 news talk programme’ (E20).

In this part of the programme, another session highlighted the connection between sensory perception and audience’ decisions and actions. It discussed how the five human senses triggered feelings that ‘determine the behaviour of an individual’ (Kelley et al., 2018, p. 96). To avoid falling into this sensory ‘capture’, the practice of Buddhist mindfulness or ‘sati’ was introduced as a potential self-reflexive mechanism that could be utilised in the process of media consumption. The integration of the traditional Buddhist discipline of *sati* made the practice of critical thinking more familiar to the elderly participants. As one participant observed, ‘We were taught to always use *sati* in our life, only it has never crossed my mind to apply it when using the media’ (E19).

### **Pedagogical design: Age-appropriate and culturally responsive**

*Group learning.* Given the large aging demographic in Thailand, aspects of aging conditions to learning ability, the generally low level of education of the aging population, and the influence of collectivism on the Thai’s way of life, activity-based learning as a training approach was the one which was considered to be most appropriate. In particular, various group activities were designed with consideration given to physical mobility, cognitive ability, individual motivation as well as paying specific attention to what were considered the

cultural frameworks inhabited by older adults in Thailand. The implementation of these group activities, including role-playing, experimenting, and case discussions, proved to be a highly effective pedagogy that engaged the elderly learner throughout the trial implementation of the programme. The group work was crafted in such a way as to accommodate tasks that demanded individual responses. Individualised skill developing exercises were managed in a way that encouraged the class to see them as a collective responsibility. This was to stimulate the learner’s dynamic participation. Most participants reported that they felt at ease taking part in all learning activities because they did not have to work alone. As one of the participants observed, ‘I was less nervous doing all the activities with friends’ (E62). Similarly, another participant, worried at first because of his low level of formal education explained: ‘Doing everything together was like I always had support from my friends’ (E35). It appeared that using a group learning technique was particularly important for older Thais because it provided them the comfort and strength to participate in the learning knowing that they were supported by a sense of group belonging.

*Sanuk element.* The formulation of the learning method in this media literacy project was what could be called the culture of ‘sanuk’ – the fun-loving approach to life that shapes the way Thai people think and act (Dounghummes & Vicars, 2020, p. 210). It was thought that, particularly for older Thai people, by applying the life philosophy of *sanuk* the potentially burdensome feelings of participating in a structured programme focused on learning unfamiliar ideas would be dissipated. This was vital due to a generally held cultural perspective that in Thailand being old gives a person the privilege to live a life with as little burden as possible. As one participant explained: ‘At my age, learning something stressful is not on my plate’ (E37). For this reason, different forms and degrees of *sanuk* were integrated into the learning process.

In a broad sense, we focused on making the learning atmosphere dynamic and relaxed, while limiting the lecture-based method to a minimum - five to ten minutes at the start and the conclusion of each hour or hour and a half session. The adoption of *sanuk* was highly praised by all participants as they reflected on the pleasure they gained from their learning experiences: ‘It didn’t feel like I was taking a course [...] really joyful.’ (E18); ‘The activity was fun and useful’ (E33); ‘I laughed a lot – didn’t feel bored at all’ (E41). *Sanuk* also became

instrumental in motivating participants to stay with the entire length of the programme as well as increasing their willingness to engage in the learning activities.

### The praxis of media literacy under the ‘spell’

The conceptualisation of media literacy for older adults in Thailand, it was decided, needed a practical strategy that could interconnect cultural notions of ‘sati’ with the process of critical engagement. This was done by way of a creating a four simple word ‘slogan’ that could easily be called to mind: Stop-Think-Ask-Act. ‘Stop’ was meant to get older adults to hold back a decision to give oneself time to ‘Think’ carefully about the positive and negative implications on oneself and others. ‘Ask’ was a prompt to get older adults to search around to verify media content from other sources, and ‘Act’ was meant to encourage media focused behaviour to be carried out in a safe and responsible manner. These four words were then packaged into what was conceptualised as a ‘spell’ and practised through a variety of cases in the final session of the programme. The cultural context of the conjuring a ‘spell’ in Thailand is derived from a set of sacred words one can cite in times of need or when facing fears, difficulties, or crises. Embedded in the spell is a supernatural power that most Thais believe can protect them from dangers or dispel fear and uncertainty (Jackson, 2016; Reynolds, 2019). As Reynolds has observed (2019, p. 5) the use of a ‘spell’ is one form of the numerous mystical practices encoded in the ‘applied sciences of prognostication and protection that offer guidance on timing and shape everyday decision-making in Thailand’.

Our invention of the Stop-Think-Ask-Act spell emerged out of an awareness of cognitive declines associated with old age, and an attempt to utilise Thai culture for the benefit of learning. Apart from easy memorisation, the use of the notion of a ‘spell’ could, it was hypothesised, also create feelings of proximity and familiarity for older adults. As one participant commented ‘[I] instantly get it when you put it as a spell’ (E 60). Incorporating the culturally specific notion of a ‘spell’ into the lessons increased the elderly learner’s cognitive ability to understand and come to terms with the unfamiliar ideas behind the concept of media literacy. Most importantly, it emerged from the group discussions that a media literacy focused spell could become a protective shield against acting impulsively to media enticements without critical engagement: ‘The spell is like a *sati* caller when I read on LINE messages.

It prevents me from spontaneously sharing the message’ (E47); ‘It prevented me from buying things that popped up on my FB’ (E55). As the programme design was put into practice, it emerged that the use of the notion of a spell was a culturally responsive mnemonic intervention that encapsulated and reinterpreted some of the essentials necessary for media literacy into a simplified and graspable form, which in effect could enhance its applicability in older adults’ daily use of media.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Recognising the significance of building older Thai adults’ media literacy competency, we aimed to design a media literacy training programme through which they could be empowered in their everyday consumption of media across multiple platforms. Through the design process, one recurring element was the emphasis on cultural contextualisation of the content and pedagogy of the training programme. This led to the reconceptualisation of the adopted Western media literacy initially used as the design framework. Not only was the Buddhist mindfulness (*sati*) integrated into media literacy competency central to the programme content, but it also facilitated older Thai adults to make a meaningful connection of this ‘foreign’ concept with their cultural life. Such competency was cultivated through a culturally informed pedagogy underpinned by the Thai value of *sanuk*. While the aging condition and educational background of participants were the first aspects considered, it became clear as the programme was delivered in each region of Thailand that older adults’ cultural values and practices worked optimally to stimulate engagement in the learning process as well as to enable meaningful connection to the programme content. Fisher and Wolf (2000) point out that learning engagement for older people centres on their ability to make sense of what they learn because it provides ‘a beacon, a direction that guides commitment, a basis for decision making, a stimulant for action, and it coalesces the experiences of the past and the present with the hope of the future’ (p. 483). More specifically, the ‘culture-informed learning styles’ of the older adult learner are vital to creating relevant and proximal contents and learning methods that could enhance lifelong media literacy for older adults in a country like Thailand. Merriam and Kee (2014, p. 141) suggest that by paying ‘attention to the learning preferences of older adults with regard to pedagogical issues’ of programme design and



implementation, older adults lifelong learning can be promoted.

Most importantly, the contextualising process of the media literacy training programme has liberated the researcher from the fixation on the predominant Western model of media literacy framed at the initial phase of the programme design. It led to the questioning about the influence of the Western media literacy epistemology and axiology on their existing knowledge and practice and how they could negotiate it with local knowledge systems to make a maximum benefit for older Thais. Such recognition has encouraged and enabled the researcher to simultaneously reconceptualise and decolonise the ‘Western’ media literacy, resulting in the inclusion of Buddhist mindfulness (*sati*) as the first and arguably most significant key element of media literacy competency (stop) that enhances the elements of critical engagement (think, ask, act), and the application of the fun-loving (*sanuk*) culture as the main pedagogical approach of these competencies.

In this sense, the decolonisation of media literacy begins with the researchers moving away from Western-centric thinking modalities through critical reflection on often neglected local/ cultural knowledge. Glück (2018) argues that a genuine process of decolonisation needs to start with ‘decolonizing the mind from colonial thinking modalities’ (p. 2) and practising ‘decolonial epistemic disobedience’ (p. 1), both of which are means to challenge Western hegemony in defining the core principle of media literacy in the Thai context. This decolonisation thus requires unlearning what the researcher has been cognitively, affectively, and relationally conditioned to think and relate in the media literacy ‘textbook’ and being transformed by the cultural contextualisation of the programme design.

This study confirms the use of a culture-responsive approach as an overarching framework of programme design. The culture-responsive approach recognises an interconnectedness that can be made between particular cultural dimensions and media literacy competencies. This can be achieved by the contextualisation of what has been up until recently essentially a Western based media literacy trajectory with the unique cultural strengths of the older adult learner. This process requires insight and knowledge gained from key stakeholders and older people themselves as well as the researcher’s critical consciousness of their own cultural insiderness/ outsidersness (Freire, 1970). To achieve the ability to recognise specific differences within broader cultural contexts, the researcher has to be culturally sensitive and

informed, and this applies to those who are and who are not members of a particular society.

In the case of developing media literacy for older adults in Thailand, very specific cultural knowledge and ‘insiderness’ enabled the identification and connectedness of the Buddhist practice of mindfulness (*sati*) and the skill of critical engagement articulated in UNESCO’s programme of promoting media and information literacy (Grizzle et al., 2021).

Western focused media literacy was reinterpreted and recontextualised for older Thais as competencies that could be attached to mindfulness and from here to be critically applied to all forms of media. This competency allows the senior time to ponder on the received content, which is arguably important considering older adults’ generally slow cognitive processing of new information (Wolfson et al., 2014). The centrality to this particular competency functions as an internal connector and a gateway that allows the other three competencies focused on critical engagement skills (questioning and assessing, information verification, and making responsible choices of action) to come into play.

The culture-responsive programme design embraces the epistemology of cultural proximity to create relevant and meaningful contents, and effective pedagogy strategies for the older adult learner. While linguistic understanding is highlighted as the key to cultural proximity (Straubhaar, 2021), in our case, it is understanding the ‘language of culture’ - consisting of the cultural values and practices of older Thais that encouraged engagement with programme. To unpack the older learner’s language of culture, requires ‘authentic knowledge of and connection with the experiences [and] histories’ of the learner (Dounghummes & Vicars, 2020, p. 213), as well as an on-going reflexivity on the part of the researcher in order to detect bias or preconceptions towards older people. The application of such cultural relativism has enabled this project to avoid the direct appropriation of what might be called the standard textbook elements of media literacy into the programme content. Instead, a compact ‘slogan’: Stop-Think-Ask-Act, delivered in the culturally proximate form (spell), could enhance the older adult’s comprehension of media content and its possible effects.

The integration of the learner’s culture into learning is arguably effective to the development of critical media literacy among aging learners. This kind of approach connects to Freire’s (1972) praxis pedagogy as

it derives directly from a cultural context and ‘concrete structures’ (p. 36), both of which encourage and cultivate the learner’s ‘reflection and action upon the world’ (p. 52) through applying theory to their everyday life. The practice of making the learning relevant to learners’ cultural life to enhance learners’ critical capacities is also highlighted in the ‘culturally responsive teaching’ pedagogy (Gay, 2010, p. 31)

Our attempt to design a media literacy training programme for and with the older Thai evidently results in the decolonisation of the epistemology of Western media literacy, as well as liberating the Thai scholar’s Western-centric mindset and practice, and media literacy education in Thai society from potentially inappropriate knowledge transfer through ‘acts of cultural cognition’. Significantly through the decolonisation and cultural integration, Western media literacy is reconceptualised and recontextualised to facilitate the creation of a praxis based-pedagogy that can help promote media literacy practices for this expanding demographic of the Thai population.

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