# Data and AI Readiness: Competencies for school students to become informed citizens

Katharina Schüller1 & Sarah Huber2 & Simon Drauz1

1STAT-UP Statistical Consulting & Data Science GmbH, Germany

2STAT-UP Statistical Consulting & Data Science GmbH, Germany, sarah.huber@stat-up.com

Focus Topic: AI and Data Science Competencies

## Motivation

The demand for *Data and AI Literacy* is currently very high: in Germany and Switzerland, Data Literacy charters call for the initiation, promotion, and implementation of measures to foster data competencies (Akademien der Wissenschaften Schweiz, 2024; Schüller et al., 2021), an increasing number of publications on AI literacy show the relevance of artificial intelligence for the educational context (Almatrafi et al., 2024), and the inclusion of AI Literacy in the EU AI Act (European Union, 2024, Article 4) now also anchors the demand for AI literacy from a political perspective. However, what competencies do Data and AI Literacy encompass?

## A standardization of Data and AI Literacy

The literature offers numerous frameworks focusing exclusively on Data Literacy competencies (e.g., Schüller et al., 2019) or AI Literacy competencies (e.g., Long & Magerko, 2020). However, (1) the proposed AI Literacy competencies vary significantly between different frameworks (Laupichler et al., 2020), and (2) a comprehensive framework combining both Data and AI Literacy does not yet exist (Olari & Romeike, 2021). Therefore, we are developing a holistic and comprehensive framework for Data and AI Literacy, which will be realized as an IEEE standard titled “Standard for Data and Artificial Intelligence (AI) Literacy, Skills, and Readiness” (IEEE Standards Association, n.d.).

The framework is being developed by an international and interdisciplinary group of data and AI researchers and practitioners, including educators, developers, and engineers worldwide. This approach ensures the applicability of the framework across different contexts and countries. The framework provides a detailed description of the competencies that individuals need to be aware of data and AI, enabling them to be ready to make data-based decisions in a critical, informed, and responsible way. These identified competencies are based on more than 25 existing frameworks for Data Literacy and AI Literacy, which have been consolidated and integrated. Thus, our framework creates a common understanding of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes individuals need to cope with upcoming societal challenges.

Unlike many of the frameworks reviewed, ours emphasizes not only knowledge and skills but also an understanding of the ethical implications of data and AI, including questions such as: How reliable and trustworthy are the results generated by these systems? How can one maintain autonomy in decision-making when AI systems offer persuasive recommendations? How far should one integrate data and AI applications into one's life? By incorporating these considerations into our framework, we are cultivating a society capable of thoughtfully evaluating the benefits and risks associated with digital technologies.

In addition, the framework also considers that different target groups need competencies at different levels (e.g., an AI developer should have a deep understanding of the underlying algorithms, while AI applicants should be more aware of where AI systems are integrated). However, every informed citizen in the 21st century consumes and provides data and AI (partly unconsciously) on different occasions.

## Applicability of the standard in the context of school students

The framework follows the idea that students should already be equipped in school with the necessary competencies to be ready to consciously identify and address diverse situations related to data and AI. The standard is not limited to a single subject but is designed to be applied across the entire spectrum of subjects, acknowledging the broad impact of data and AI on all disciplines. In our contribution to the “Symposium on Integrating AI and Data Science into School Education Across Disciplines”, we highlight the competencies for the target group of K-12 students that can be understood as common, minimum standards necessary in order for them to become informed citizens.

## Further applications of the standard in the educational context

By providing a complete catalog of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, our competence framework for Data and AI Literacy can be used to develop school curricula (and likewise curricula for teacher education programs), evaluate educational programs, and consider competence development.

## Value

Our proposed contribution thus offers a new perspective on conceptualizing AI and Data Science Competencies. It underlines the goal to embed Data and AI literacy as a fundamental component of education—from early schooling to higher education and professional training—to enable individuals to make informed decisions in a data-driven, AI-integrated world.

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