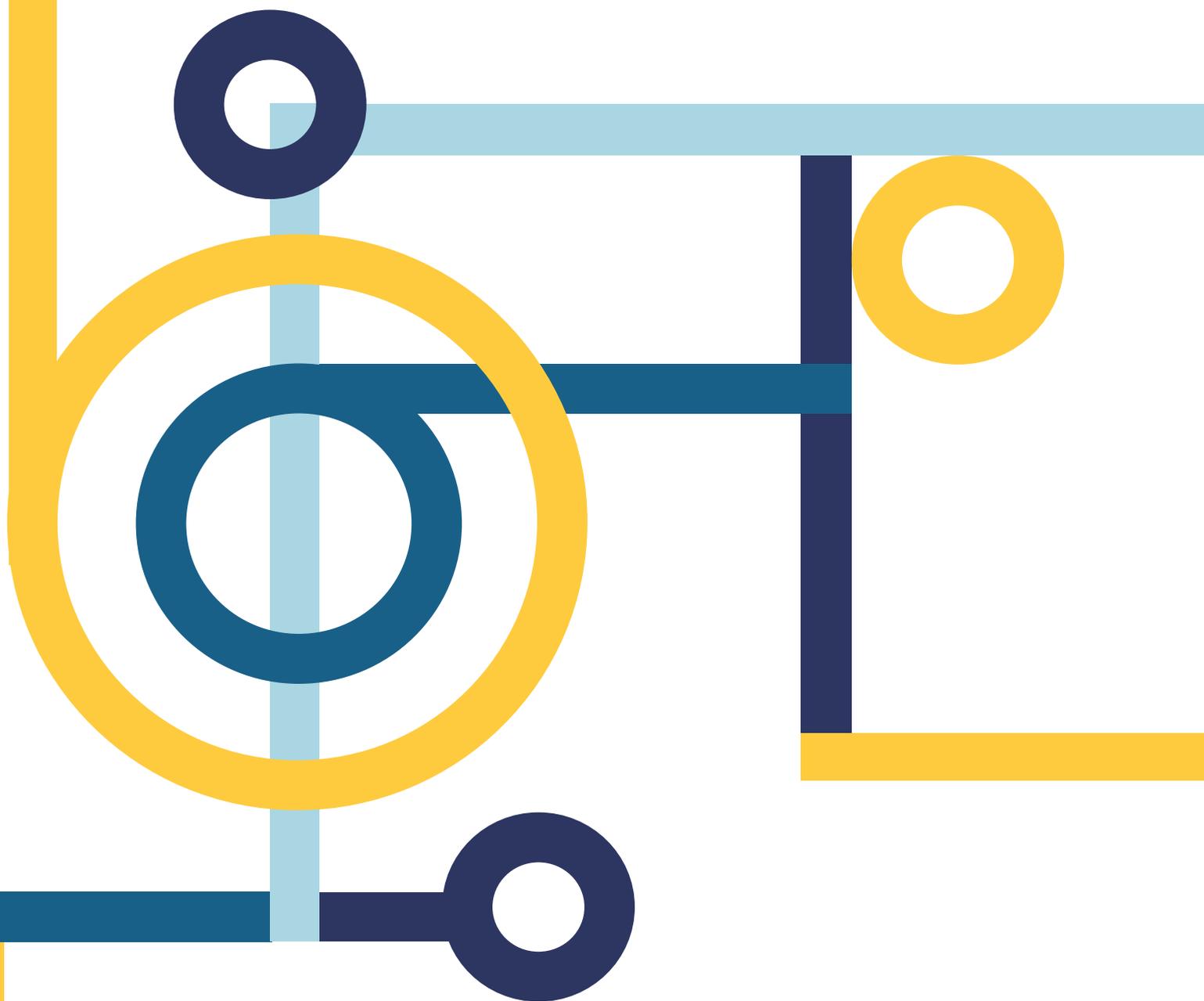




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MEDIA LITERACY

in the university study programs in the Republic of North Macedonia

Skopje, February 2022

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ABOUT THE RESEARCH

In this age of hyperproduction of information, growing social polarization, in this world of algorithms and flood of disinformation, the academic community receives continuous demands to provide the “vaccine” called media literacy that will make the citizens resilient to various forms of media manipulation. A media literate person has both the knowledge and skills to navigate through the media and use the media roadmap to get to the desired information, to enjoy the privileges of the online space, while avoiding the information that would harm them.

This baseline analysis in front of you is an effort of the Institute for Communication Studies (ICS) to do a mapping of media literacy in higher education in the Republic of North Macedonia. Taking as its starting point the need for a continuous improvement of the skills for a proper utilization of the digital environment, this research explores the commitment and the will of the universities and the faculties in the country to tackle media literacy as one of their priorities. The desk research and the interviews with certain professors give an overview of the study programs in all public and public-private universities, as well as in a few private higher education institutions, put in correlation with the expected competencies, skills, knowledge of media, information and digital literacy.

One of the main conclusions is that higher education institutions, which used to include media literacy only sporadically in various related disciplines, will, as of this and also in future academic years, include it as an individual and mandatory subject in the curriculum. The universities will have media literacy as an elective subject. The intention is to include media literacy in social sciences and humanities, particularly at the faculties of pedagogy that train future educators who will be teaching the youngest.

The research also intended to take the pulse of the students, and identify their experience, attitudes and needs about the extent to which higher education allows them to be up to date with the latest trends in the digital society. A special focus was put on the students with disabilities who shared their experience about the first component of media literacy - access to information through the lens of infrastructural and advancement opportunities offered by higher education institutions.

The ICS research is part of the five-year YouThink media literacy project implemented by IREX and the Macedonian Institute for Media and the Macedonian Educational Forum, with the support of USAID.

Zhaneta Trajkoska,
Institute for Communication Studies

Media literacy is a particularly complex concept that involves various research and scientific disciplines, and relies on a variety of empirical research. Being a dynamic matter, a subject to constant change and influence of the digital transformation and new media, it needs to be perpetually evolving, enlarging, and upgrading. Since 2016, media literacy activities have intensified due to the rise of new digital age phenomena and challenges, such as the rise in disinformation and the viral expansion of the so-called fake news.

The fast development of the new media and social media brought along a new reality encouraging the professional community and academia to be more committed to the development of the knowledge and skills that a modern person needs to have in order to be able to engage and act in the webbed digital world in a safe and responsible manner, as well as to resist media manipulations, disinformation and other harmful occurrences which the media create. Media literacy also focuses on the need for education that will improve our experience with the media as users and will increase the positive aspects of the communication so that we have greater participation in society and the decision-making process of public interest.



1.1. Objectives and main research questions

In such context, the main objective of this analysis is to investigate the presence of media literacy study programs at the universities and other higher education institutions in the Republic of North Macedonia. The research covers all accredited higher education institutions and the different vocational education study programs at those institutions. The findings from this research should give a clear picture of the extent, the manner, and the form in which media literacy is present in higher education, in order to identify the positives and negatives of media education in the country.

The baseline questions of this analysis which defined the subsequent methodology and the research questionnaires, are as follows:

- Is media literacy included in the study programs and in the subjects of the study programs in the first and second cycle of studies in higher education institutions in the country and how are these topics incorporated in the curricula?
- What scientific and professional knowledge, skills and abilities do students acquire after completing the first and second cycle study programs vis-à-vis the National Framework of Higher Education Qualifications, in terms of understanding the media, use of the media, skills for critical perception and evaluation of the media content?
- How do the influx of disinformation and various media manipulations affect the educational practices of higher education institutions, especially in terms of the interest and the need to acquire skills, understanding, and perspectives to deal with disinformation?

1.2. Main beneficiaries of the research

This research and its findings should be of use to various social stakeholders so that they can have a better understanding of the context and the potential of media literacy in education as well as the reality with higher education in the Republic of North Macedonia; to identify the areas which need an additional engagement and the key challenges and drawbacks in terms of including media literacy in the higher education. In this context, key target groups include the main educational institutions, such as the Ministry of Education and the Bureau for Development of Education, universities and other higher education institutions in the country, the teaching staff, the scientific research community, the civil society working in media education and other stakeholders in the fields of education, media and communications.

Structurally, the research is divided into several parts including an analysis of the basic concepts and approaches in media literacy, the key initiatives, documents, and other strategic instruments for the international development of media literacy.

This section is followed by an analysis of the media literacy presence in primary and secondary education in the Republic of North Macedonia, which draws upon the contrastive analysis with several previous types of research and the main objectives and findings. This research should, therefore, give an improved contextualization of the various levels of media literacy inclusion in the educational system and should help identify more clearly the main media literacy stakeholders in the educational process.

1.3. Research methodology

Several combined methods and techniques, which were adapted to the researched subject matter, were applied, as follows:

1. Content analysis

In order to obtain a comprehensive picture of the inclusion of media literacy in higher education, combined quantitative and qualitative methods have been used. Key national and international documents, such as laws, national strategies, declarations, resolutions, strategic recommendations, and action plans were chosen to be in the focus of the analysis. The following documents can be singled out:

- The 1982 UNESCO Declaration on Media Education
- Council of Europe Resolution (2005) 3 on “Integration and Diversity: New Frontiers in European Media and Communication Policy”.
- Council of Europe Resolution (2009), on “Towards a New Notion of Media”.
- Council of Europe Recommendation (2000) 1466 on “Media Education”.
- European Parliament Directive 2007 on audio-visual media services.
- European Charter on Media Literacy
- Law on Primary Education
- Law on Audio and Audio-visual Media Services, Republic of Macedonia (2013)
- Law on Media, Republic of Macedonia (2013)
- Comprehensive Education Strategy 2018-2025 of the Ministry of Education and Science, et cetera.

The research focused specifically on study programs delivered by accredited higher education institutions in the country that provide first and second cycle studies¹, primarily in the field of media, communications, journalism, and information technologies, as well as on study programs of the faculties of pedagogy within all universities in the R.N.Macedonia.

¹ Source: Ministry of Education and Science, “List of accredited higher education institutions in the Republic of North Macedonia”, available at <https://mon.gov.mk/page/?id=2047>, accessed on: 29.01.2022.

2. In-depth interviews and focus groups

The analysis includes interviews with professors from higher education institutions in order to determine the factual situation, the advantages and challenges of studying media literacy, as well as focus groups with students from higher education institutions in the country. During the research, a total of fifteen interviews were conducted with rectors, deans and professors from the faculties belonging to the following public, public-private and private universities: “St. Cyril and Methodius” and “Mother Teresa” from Skopje, “St. Kliment Ohridski” from Bitola, the “Goce Delchev” University from Shtip, the State University - Tetovo and the University of Southeast Europe from Tetovo, as well as two private universities: “American College” and International Balkan University from Skopje.

In order to identify the perspectives and needs of students in terms of improvement of skills for critical analysis of media content, the infrastructural situation at the faculties that will ensure proper access to information technologies and in order to make an assessment of the academic environment for development and research activities, during November and December 2021 ICS organized seven focus groups with students from public and private universities: Faculty of Law at the “St. Cyril and Methodius” University in Skopje (study programs for journalism, political studies and public relations), students from the faculties of Pedagogy at the Universities “St. Cyril and Methodius” from Skopje, “St. Kliment Ohridski” from Bitola, the State University of Tetovo, the Faculty of Educational Sciences from the “Goce Delchev” University from Shtip, students from the South East European University from Tetovo and students from the International Balkan University from Skopje. For the interviews and focus groups, semi-structured questionnaires were prepared that were conceptualized according to the established objectives and the research questions.²

In the selection of the participants, ICS adhered to the principles of equal representation of participants and target groups by gender, geographical, ethnic background, including participants from different age and socio-economic groups, as well as groups that included people with disabilities.

2 The questionnaires for the professors and students are attached as Annex 1 and Annex 2

The changes in the media system and the significant increase of new types of media have led to increased exposure to information and influence by the media³. In the Republic of North Macedonia, for example, there were 110 commercial broadcasters in early 2021, of which 45 were televisions and 65 radio stations⁴. Hundreds of other television and radio channels are available to the public through cable operators and satellite systems.

The number of Internet media has also been rising. The list of professional online media registers only 101 outlets, however, the real number of online media available via the internet exceeds 200⁵. The availability of information through social media, such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and others, adds to the impact on the so-called “Information oversaturation”. Available statistical data⁶ show that the country has 1.71 million Internet users (82% of the total population) and 1.2 million users of social media, with figures steadily rising in recent years.

³ “People spent an average of 4.8 hours a day on their mobile phones in 2021. The average time spent on mobile applications is four hours and 48 minutes, which is 30% more than in 2019. This was calculated based on data from ten markets, including India, Turkey, the United States, Japan, Mexico, Singapore and Canada. Consumers in Brazil, Indonesia and South Korea exceeded five hours a day. At that time, seven out of every 10 minutes were spent on social, photo and video applications”, source: Data.ai (2021), “The State of Mobile in 2022: How to Succeed in a Mobile-First World As Consumers Spend 3.8 Trillion Hours on Mobile Devices”, available at <https://www.data.ai/en/insights/market-data/state-of-mobile-2022/> accessed on 15.01.2022.

⁴ According to the Agency for Audio and Audio-visual Media Services, there are 11 national broadcasters (5 terrestrial, 4 cable and 2 satellite televisions), including 18 regional and 16 local broadcasters. In terms of radio stations, 4 broadcast on a national level and 17 on a regional level, while the rest broadcast only on a local level. Source: Agency for Audio and Audio-visual Media Services, “Broadcasters”, available at <https://avmu.mk/radiodifuzeri-mk/> accessed on 15.01.2022.

⁵ According to the SEC, The Register of broadcasters, print media and electronic media and internet portals accepted 41 televisions, 48 radio stations, 10 print newspapers and 195 electronic media (internet portals) in 2021. State Election Commission (2022), “Decision for entry in the Register of broadcasters, print media and electronic media and internet portals”, available at <https://www.sec.mk/registar-na-radiodifuzeri-pechateni-mediumi-i-elektronski-mediumi-internet-portali-3> accessed on 15.01.2022.

⁶ Data Reportal (2021), “Digital 2021: North Macedonia”, available at <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-north-macedonia> accessed on 15.01.2022.

As a result of the current rapid development of information and communication technologies, media messages and contents have been present in every field of our life.⁷ The increased use of these technologies continued, especially during the pandemic in 2020 and 2021, when health protection measures largely required indirect communication⁸ but also remote work⁹.

The abundance of information we are exposed to daily requires adjustment and change of how we deal with that information and how we cope with the challenges of the new information and digital age; especially, how we select and find information; how much time we spend on media and how they affect our awareness, beliefs, and behavior. Also, the influx of media and information significantly affects young people who, being in such a sensitive stage of their development, are shaping their attitudes and views about the world and the environment they live in. Their attachment to the media and new digital technologies can often lead to addiction¹⁰.

This accelerated process of hyper production of information and its increased influence on the audience requires a collective commitment to a systematic solution. The experience of many countries shows that media literacy and media education have proven to be the most effective approach to train the audience on proper and constructive use of the media, as well as to ensure a solid level of protection against the side effects of the media.

The essence of building and having media literacy lies in the fact that “a higher level of media literacy ensures a more intelligible understanding of the line between the real world and the media reality¹¹”. A media literate person has both knowledge and skills to navigate through the media and use the media roadmap to obtain the wanted information and experience, without being exposed to the information that would harm them. In other words, “you are in a position to build your own life the way you decide and want, and not let the media build your life the way they want”¹².

Often, media users with insufficient media literacy have a false sense that they know “what is going on in the world” only because they have been using and consuming media information extensively and on a regular basis. According to Everette Dennis, “media illiteracy is potentially harmful and toxic to the human spirit and intellect, just like the contaminated water or the bad food”¹³.

7 YouTube is the most popular video streaming application worldwide, with over one million downloads in 60 different countries. Netflix is second in many regions. Mobile games are also growing, with people spending \$116 billion on them. In 2021 especially popular are so-called “Hyper-casual games” (for relaxed pastime). Source: AppAnnie report (2021), “The State of Mobile in 2022: How to Succeed in a Mobile-First World As Consumers Spend 3.8 Trillion Hours on Mobile Devices”, available at <https://www.data.ai/en/insights/market-data/state-of-mobile-2022/> accessed on 15.01.2022.

8 “Because of the restrictive measures introduced after the outbreak of the coronavirus, many people around the world are forced to stay in their homes, where many of them complete their work responsibilities online, follow the teaching process and engage in physical activity. Research shows that people have never spent so much time online on their computers and mobile phones. According to an analysis by Business Today magazine, 75% of social media users started spending much more time on Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp due to the coronavirus”. Source Günyol, A (2020) Due to the pandemic, many people became “tied” to the Internet”. Available at <https://is.gd/v5CrE2> accessed on 15.01.2022.

9 “For example, people have spent a lot of time on shopping applications - more than 100 billion hours globally, with Singapore, Indonesia and Brazil growing the fastest. There has also been huge growth in food and beverage applications - such as UberEats and Grubhub. The number of visits or sessions on such applications increased to 194 billion in 2021, which is 50% more than the previous year. Health and fitness applications also grew, as the pandemic meant that people could not always attend gyms or hold group workouts. And as a reflection of the greater emphasis on mental well-being, meditation apps like Headspace and Calm have also proven to be popular - especially among young people, with the top five downloads growing by 27% in 2021. The payments for meeting applications also increased by over 4 billion dollars, which is an increase of 95% from 2018. Source: AppAnnie report (2021)” The State of Mobile in 2022: How to Succeed in a Mobile-First World As Consumers Spend 3.8 Trillion Hours on Mobile Devices”, available at <https://www.data.ai/en/insights/market-data/state-of-mobile-2022/> accessed on 15.01.2022.

10 Source: Shtikelman, Sh (2018), “Study: 100,000 children and young people are addicted to social media” (2018), available at <https://is.gd/AYMeF2> accessed on 15.01.2022.

11 Potter, J. (2008), Media Literacy, 4th edition, SAGE publications, p. 32.

12 Potter, J. (2008), Media Literacy, 4th edition, SAGE publications, p. 32.

13 Denis, E. (1996), Children and the Media, Routledge, London.

Media literacy helps the process of detecting negative and harmful influence of the media and encourages continuous improvement and training for better control and protection from information and various media contents. Everette's metaphor of "media toxicity" becomes more credible with the current development of the media industry, the automation of information consumption, the presence of algorithms in the filtering of information, and the diversity of new media channels and content. Media literacy, in principle, does not cast off the use of the media, but recommends and teaches caution, supervision and control over their use instead.

As an education concept, media literacy gradually began to take shape in the 70s, with the UNESCO Declaration on Media Education¹⁴ of 1982 paving the road for the development of this discipline and opening the window for its integration in the education process. Media literacy was further defined and conceptualized in 1992¹⁵ as "the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate information in all their forms" (Aufderheide, 1992)¹⁶ and a media literate person is "anyone who can decode, analyze, evaluate and produce both print and electronic media"¹⁷. The four main components (decoding, analyzing, evaluating and producing information and media content) can be further subdivided into seven key media literacy skills:

1. Analysis – Segmentation of media messages into meaningful units

2. Evaluation - Evaluation or assessment of the values and effects of the message elements by comparing them with other message elements, by using specific standard methods and practices.

3. Grouping - Determining which message elements are similar in a particular view or action, as well as determining how a particular group of message elements differ from other elements or groups of elements.

4. Induction - Establishing patterns of how the message elements are grouped and combined and how they are then spread to other messages.

5. Deduction – Use of predetermined general principles in order to interpret individual elements of the messages.

6. Synthesis - Connecting message elements into new and more complex message structures.

7. Abstraction - Giving a short, clear and precise description that reflects the essence of the message in fewer characters and words than the message itself¹⁸.

14 According to the 1982 Declaration of the UNESCO Symposium on Media Education. This Declaration was adopted unanimously by the representatives of 19 countries at the 1982 UNESCO International Symposium on Media Education in Grunwald, Federal Republic of Germany.

15 "The very term 'media literacy' was defined back in 1992, at the National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy in Aspen, USA". Source: Chopin V, Temenugova A, Aksentievskaa M (2018), "Media Literacy in Macedonia: An Attempt for Implementation in Primary Education", Higher School of Journalism and Public Relations, Skopje.

16 Aufderheide, P. (1993), Media Literacy - A Report of The National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy, The Aspen Institute, Washington DC available at <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED365294.pdf> accessed on 15.01.2022.

17 "This definition of media literacy originated from the 'Media Literacy Conference organized by the Aspen Institute in Washington in 1992, where, according to theorists, the concept of media literacy as a new branch of the social sciences was born,'" Sopar, V., Kjupeva, T., and Temenugova, A. (2016) "Media Literacy in Macedonia: The Missing Link for Active Citizenship", Institute for Communication Studies, Skopje, p. 10.

18 Potter, J. (2008), Media Literacy, 4th edition, SAGE publications, p. 41.

There are various approaches in defining media literacy that emphasize different aspects of the media's impacts and influence. For example, the definition of media literacy as a set of attitudes and skills for interpreting media messages, emphasizes what meanings we derive from media messages and how this affects our experience of social reality. This approach also points out that media literacy is a continuous and dynamic process rather than a strictly applied specific conceptual category. Close to this definition of media literacy are Adams and Hamm¹⁹ who see it as “the ability to create individual meanings from the visual and verbal symbols that are consumed every day from television, advertising, movies, digital media.”

A group of institutions and individuals from various EU countries²⁰, led by the Film Council of the United Kingdom (UK), have published a Charter that gives a definition of media literacy. This initiative was aimed at overcoming the terminological problem of what media literacy is and called on various interested organizations to sign this Charter in order to adhere to the common definition of media literacy.

According to the European Charter for Media Literacy: “Media literate people should be able to use media technologies effectively to access, store, retrieve and share content to meet their individual and community needs and interests; gain access to, and make informed choices about, a wide range of media forms and content from different cultural and institutional sources; understand how and why media content is produced; analyze critically the techniques, languages and conventions used by the media, and the messages they convey; use media creatively to express and communicate ideas, information and opinions; Identify, and avoid or challenge, media content and services that may be unsolicited, offensive or harmful; make effective use of media in the exercise of their democratic rights and civic responsibilities.

The definition that supports the European Charter for Media Literacy includes various elements that can be included in the following sub-types:

1. Media literacy means learning how to use information and communication technology (ICT). This is also sometimes called “computer literacy” or “digital literacy”, meaning it involves learning how to make effective use of digital information and communication devices.
2. Learning how to analyze and “read” media messages, whether in words, images or sound, or a combination of these. It is necessary to analyze the structure of the words, images or sounds so as to be able to think critically about the content and the meaning of messages.
3. Learning about the media themselves, including their organization, working practices and the interests behind the medium.
4. Learning creative skills i.e. how to create and present media messages using different communication technologies.

In this context of defining media literacy, a very important aspect should be noted: “media literacy is not simply about using media and knowing facts and statistics about them, but asking the right questions about what we see, hear or read” (Shoap et al., 2016, p. 10).

19 Adams, D. and Hamm, M. (2000), *Media and Literacy: Learning in an Electronic Age-Issues, Ideas, and Teaching Strategies*, Charles C Thomas Pub Ltd; 2nd edition.

20 Source: Euromedia Literacy (2008), About this initiative bullet - Frequently Asked Questions available at <https://euromedialiteracy.eu/about.php> accessed on 15.01.2022.

The Paris Declaration on Media and Information Literacy²¹, adopted in 2014 under the auspices of UNESCO, the European Commission and other educational institutions, reaffirms the importance of media literacy and calls for enhanced engagement and education in today's digital environment, as well as for improved cooperation between the key stakeholders and other stakeholders for the purpose of fostering media literacy. This declaration associates more closely media literacy with information literacy, that is, it creates the concept of the so-called MIL (media and information literacy), perceiving its connection as a solid basis for the development of the skills necessary for both (sub)areas.

For UNESCO, to create an environment where media and information literacy is available to all, shall require an introduction of national policies and programs targeting the key objectives of media and information literacy. As part of its overall MIL strategy, UNESCO published policy and strategy guidelines²² that offer coordinated and harmonized approach to help member states design sustainable national MIL policies and strategies²³.

Other categories and notions pertaining to media literacy are further derived from these main concepts, such as, digital citizenship i.e. "use of information technology for inclusion and activity in society, politics, and institutional management."²⁴ According to Mosberger et al. (2007), digital citizens are "those who use the Internet regularly and effectively".

Furthermore, "democracy and freedom of expression of today cannot be contemplated without thinking about the media - the public sphere vital for the functioning of democracy. The ongoing process of digitalization has altered the function of the media, as well as the structure of governance and the nature of markets. Our communication system is changing in terms of time and space and modes of social behavior. In sum, it is transforming the public sphere"²⁵.

These policies and strategies are the first of their kind to integrate MIL as a composite concept, combining information literacy and media literacy with the right to freedom of expression and access to information through ICT. This confirms the multidisciplinary nature of media literacy and its reliance on various scientific and educational disciplines.

In this context of identifying the connection between media literacy and other important disciplines and scientific and educational areas, we should also mention the concept of "digital competence".²⁶ The "Digital Competence Framework for Citizens", also known as DigComp, was first published in 2013 by the European Commission. It is envisaged as a tool to improve the digital competence of citizens, in order to help social actors formulate the policies supporting digital competence, including establishing and planning education and training initiatives aimed at improving the digital competencies of specific target groups. DigComp also provides tools and procedures on how to identify and describe the key aspects and features of the 21st-century digital competence.²⁷

21 UNESCO (2014), "Paris Declaration on Media and Information Literacy adopted", available at <https://en.unesco.org/news/paris-declaration-media-and-information-literacy-adopted> accessed on 15.01.2022.

22 UNESCO (2013), "Media and information literacy: policy and strategy guidelines", available at <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000225606> accessed on 15.01.2022.

23 UNESCO, Developing MIL Policy and Strategy, available at <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/media-development/media-literacy/developing-mil-policy-and-strategy/> accessed on 15.01.2022.

24 Mossberger, K., Tolbert, C. and McNeal, R. (2007), Digital Citizenship, The Internet, Society, and Participation, MIT press.

25 UNESCO (2013), "Media and Information Literacy, Policy and Strategy Guidelines", United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization publication, p. 9.

26 More details are available at: European Commission (2021), "Being digitally competent - a task for the 21st-century citizen", available at <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/digcomp> accessed on 15.01.2022.

27 Vuorikari, R., Punie, Y., Carretero Gomez, S., Van den Brande, G. (2016), DigComp 2.0: The Digital Competence Framework for Citizens. Update Phase 1: The Conceptual Reference Model. Luxembourg Publication Office of the European Union, p. 5-6.

Since 2013, DigComp has been used for many purposes, especially in areas such as employment, education, training and lifelong learning. DigComp has also been implemented in practice at the EU level, for instance, for the development of the indicator known as “Digital Skills” (DS), which is used to monitor the processes of the digital economy in the society. An additional example is the inclusion of this indicator in the Europass CV model²⁸, which allows job seekers to “measure” their own digital competence and include it in their CV as information.

Digital competence includes 5 key levels that refer to a total of 21 key competencies:

1. Information and data literacy

- Browsing, searching, and filtering data, information and digital content, accessing various data as well as creating personal strategies for searching information.
- Evaluation of data, information, and digital content i.e. ability to analyze, compare and critically assess the credibility and reliability of data sources, information and digital content.
- Management of data, information and digital content i.e. skills for organizing, storing and downloading data, information and content on digital platforms.

2. Communication and cooperation

- Interaction through digital technologies and skills in order to communicate by using various digital technologies and to use appropriate digital means of communication.
- Sharing of information by using digital technologies i.e. the ability to act as an information intermediary.
- Engaging in civic activities through digital technologies, expanding opportunities for self-empowerment and for participatory citizenship through appropriate digital technologies.
- Cooperation through digital technologies and use of digital tools for cooperation and creation of knowledge resources.
- Net-culture (also known as Netiquette) i.e. awareness of the behavioral norms when using digital technologies and during the interaction via digital platforms. Adaptation of communication strategies to a specific audience and awareness of the cultural and generational diversity of the digital platforms.
- Digital identity management i.e. creating and managing one or more digital identities, as well as protecting one’s own reputation.

3. Creating digital content

- Development of digital content in various formats, ability to express ourselves through digital means.
- Integrating digital content, changing, improving, and integrating information and content into existing knowledge, as well as creating new, original, and relevant content and knowledge.
- Copyright and licenses, ability to understand copyrights and licenses applicable to data, information, and digital content.
- Programming, planning, and developing instructions for computer systems in order to solve given problems or perform specific tasks.

²⁸ Source: European Union (2021), Europass, available at <https://europa.eu/europass/eportfolio/screen/profile-wizard?lang=en> accessed on 15.01.2022.

4. Security

- Protection of devices and understanding of risks and threats in the digital environment. Knowledge of security measures and confidentiality and privacy practices.
- Protection of personal data and privacy in digital environments. Understanding of how to use and share personal identification information, understand how digital services create and use a “privacy policy” and how personal data are used.
- Protection of health and well-being, avoidance of health risks and threats to the physical and psychological well-being when using digital technologies.
- Protection against possible dangers in digital environments (e.g. cyber-bullying). Awareness of digital technologies as means of protecting the public interest and for social inclusion.
- Environmental protection i.e. to be aware of the environmental impact when using digital technologies.

5. Problem-solving

- Solving technical problems when handling devices
- Identifying needs, adjusting, and adapting digital platforms for personal use.
- Creative use of digital technologies to create knowledge and innovate services and products, as well as problem-solving at digital platforms.
- Identifying gaps in one’s own digital competence i.e. in what areas one needs to improve or update his/ her digital competencies, looking for opportunities for self-development and keeping up with the digital evolution.

When it comes to media literacy, it would be useful to explain certain differences in how this topic is treated in Europe and in the United States. These differences, be it small or big, add value to the development of this academic discipline by offering various experiences and opportunities for inclusion in different societies and education systems. In the North American context, one of the most influential and widely accepted models of media literacy is that of Renee Hobbs.²⁹ She started to develop the key concepts for her model in 2010 in her book “Action Plan for Digital and Media Literacy”³⁰ where she sets out proposals on how to incorporate digital and media literacy into formal and non-formal education through the concept of inclusive education in the community.

She defines digital and media literacy as a combination and constellation of life skills necessary for full participation in our media-rich and information-rich societies.³¹ These include the ability to do the following:

Make responsible choices and access information by locating and sharing materials, as well as comprehending different information and ideas.

29 Renee Hobbs is an American scientist and educator working in the field of media literacy education. She is a Professor of Communication Studies at Harrington School of Communications and Media and is the Founder of the Media Education Laboratory at the University of Rhode Island, USA.

30 Hobbs, R. (2010), *Digital and Media Literacy: A Plan of Action*, The Aspen Institute Communications and Society Program.

31 Hobbs, R. (2010), *Digital and Media Literacy: A Plan of Action*, The Aspen Institute Communications and Society Program, p. 7.

1. Analyze the messages in a variety of forms by identifying the author, purpose and point of view of the information, and evaluating the quality and credibility of the content.
2. Create content in a variety of forms, making use of language, images, sound and new digital tools and technologies.
3. Reflect on one's own conduct and communication behavior by applying social responsibility and ethical principles.
4. Take social action by working individually or collaboratively to share knowledge and solve problems in the family, workplace and community.

She adds “These digital and media literacy competencies, which constitute core competencies of citizenship in the digital age, have enormous practical value. To be able to apply for jobs online, people need skills to find relevant information. To get relevant health information, people need to be able to distinguish between a marketing ploy for nutritional supplements and solid information based on research evidence. To take advantage of online educational opportunities, people need to have a good understanding of how knowledge is constructed and how it represents and articulated reality.”³²

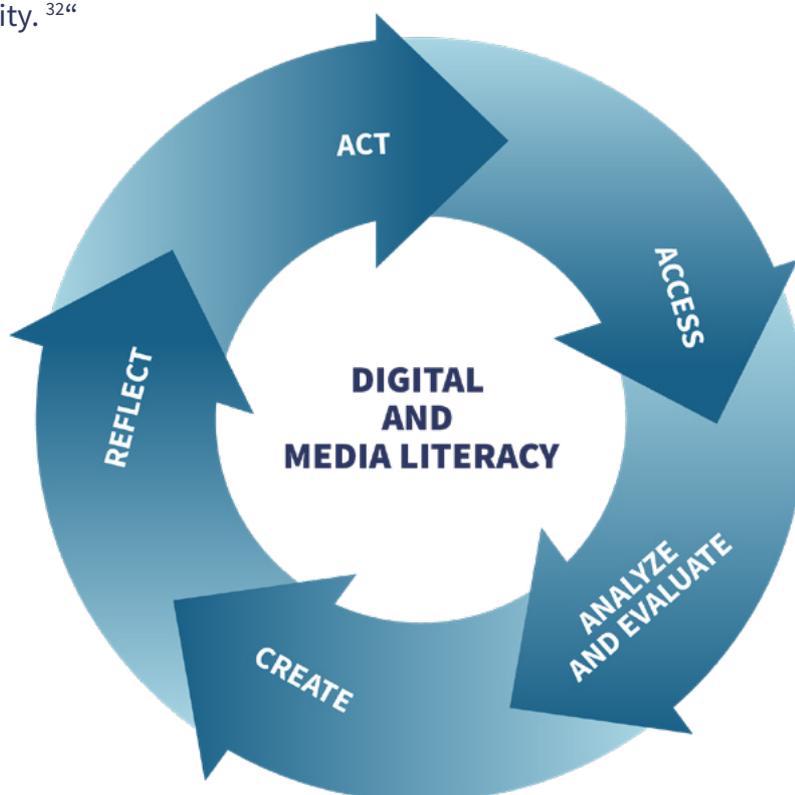


Chart 1: Key competencies of digital and media literacy, Hobbes, 2010.

These five competencies work together in a spiral of empowerment³³ supporting people's active participation in the lifelong learning process by consuming and creating messages.

In a nutshell, she uses this model and the term “digital and media literacy” to encompass a wide range of cognitive, emotional, and social competencies that include use of texts, tools and technologies, critical thinking and analysis skills, message shaping skills and their creative use, a person's ability to engage in thinking and ethical activities, including the competencies to participate in teamwork and collaboration.

32 Hobbs, R. (2010), Digital and Media Literacy: A Plan of Action, The Aspen Institute Communications and Society Program, p. 8.

33 Hobbs, R. (2020), Media Literacy and Online Learning, available at <https://reenehobbs.medium.com/educators-all-around-the-world-are-engaged-in-the-process-of-online-learning-during-the-time-of-3e8c0beb982b> accessed on 15.01.2022.

When people have digital and media literacy competencies, they can recognize social, corporate, and political agendas and can speak for themselves or on behalf of the repressed communities the voice of which is suppressed, thus exercising their legal rights.

In view of the afore-described approaches and the various definitions of media literacy, we can conclude that this is an interdisciplinary concept that aims to integrate spheres that are distinct and related, so as to address the current challenges of the new digital age. Media literacy, in the countries where it has been developing for decades, serves as an integrator of various areas and methodologies in the process of finding effective solutions in education, but also in communication practice.

Another very important aspect of media literacy is that it also serves as the basis for the creation and conceptualization of supplementary categories of crucial import for the digitalized societies in this contemporary world of technologies and webs, such as digital literacy, digital competence, functional literacy, the concept of the digital citizen and myriad of others which may still be in their infancy but will gain greater importance with the rise of the integrated digital technologies in education, communication and social organization.

It is also imperative to emphasize that media literacy is a continuous process. In modern high-tech societies, a person goes through several stages of development as far as media are concerned: the acquisition of the basic notions, the acquisition of speech and communication skills, the development of narrative skills, the development of skepticism, intensive development, research capacity, critical approach and social responsibility (Potter, pp. 50-52)³⁴. The first four stages take place during the childhood while the intensive phase follows immediately afterwards.

Without an outside social support, most individuals remain at this level of their media competence for the rest of their lives – thinking that they have sufficient abilities to interpret and use media content and information properly. Nevertheless, primarily due to the pace in which the modern ICT develops, the media content and their continuous change and evolution, media literacy must be continually maintained and improved. The idea of the new approaches in this sphere is to integrate media literacy in the process of education thus providing the basic tools for the younger population during their development stages; further on, to build a high social awareness and engagement which will provide lasting support to citizens, by involving the institutions, the civil society, the academia and other stakeholders.



34 Potter, J. (2008), *Media Literacy*, 4th edition, SAGE publications, p. 50.

03 MEDIA LITERACY IN REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA

In the last few years, media literacy has arisen in public communication and in the media in the Republic of North Macedonia often, mainly in the context of the new challenges that the Internet and social media brought along. Many issues, such as disinformation, fake news, political propaganda, abuse of private data and videos, cyber-bullying, hate speech and so on, have grabbed the focus of the public, media, civil society, and institutions about the possible solutions in these spheres. Experts, civil society organizations as well as educators and certain institutions, recognize media literacy as the principal concept and the tool for solving the existing problems.³⁵ As a result of this gradual change, a number of activities in the field of media literacy could now be identified in the Republic of North Macedonia.

In 2010, the Macedonian Institute for Media, in cooperation with the Institute for Democracy and the Bureau for Development of Education developed a Handbook on teaching Media Literacy in the mother tongue, including training for over 1,000 educators in primary and secondary education. Unfortunately, the competent institutions procrastinated the approval for its implementation at the schools, which is why it was never entirely implemented.

According to the Agency for Audio and Audio-visual Media Services (AVMS), the Republic of North Macedonia has, on the institutional level, accepted the definition of the European Expert Group on media literacy as “ the capacity for critical interpretation of the course, meaning, value and consequences of the media content in its many forms, in order to enable citizens to use the media and communicate effectively through them”³⁶.

35 “The influx of fake news, misinformation and propaganda on a global and local level entails the need for a critically oriented audience that will be able to identify the information in the various news and use the media appropriately in all their forms. The main tool for combating any type of abuse of freedom of expression in/ through the media is the high level of media literacy of the citizens who will be able to recognize and identify fake news and the tendency in the creation of public opinion. Through media literacy education, the citizens will have the opportunity to participate in every aspect of public life and democratic processes” Source: Agency for Audio and Audio-visual Media Services (2019),” Regulatory Strategy for Development of Audio and Audiovisual Activity for the period 2019 - 2023”, p. 59.

36 “(The media literacy) is established like this in the Program for encouraging media literacy in the Republic of Macedonia 2016 - 2018, which was developed in 2015, with expert support provided under the IPA project funded by the European Commission for “Strengthening the administrative capacity of the bodies in charge of telecommunications and media for efficient regulation of the new digital and multipurpose services”. Source: Agency for Audio and Audio-visual Media Services (2019),” Regulatory strategy for development of audio and audio-visual activity for the period 2019 - 2023”, p. 57.

In 2017, thirty-five founding members created the Media Literacy Network³⁷, including the independent media regulatory body - the Agency for Audio and Audio-visual Media Services (AVMS). Today, the number of members almost doubled – there are 67³⁸ of them, including public institutions, Ministries, civil society organizations, educational institutions and broadcasters. The ML Network remains active in promoting media literacy through activities that consist of campaigns, projects, training, workshops and other project and action activities³⁹, including Media Literacy Days⁴⁰.

AVMS is also one of the first institutions that gradually introduced and used the term *media literacy*, for instance, in the “Strategy for Broadcasting Activity 2013-2017⁴¹“. One of the development objectives established in the Regulatory Strategy for Development of Audio and Audio-visual Activity for the period 2019-2023⁴² is “reduction of differences in the media literacy levels, which is a strategically important issue for both the audience and the broadcasters.”

“It is necessary for the audience to clarify the criteria used to distinguish the credibility i.e. the presumed factuality brought by the informative genres and the document, as opposed to - fiction and analytics derived from them i.e. the right to subjective but in the same time responsible (genre) journalistic or artistic interpretation⁴³“.

The Law on Audio and Audio-visual Media Services vests the AVMS with competencies and responsibilities “to encourage media literacy through cooperation with NGOs, civil associations, educational institutions and other stakeholders, to provide visibility of such activities on its website and to inform about them on regular basis in annual reports” (Article 26). The Republic of North Macedonia is part of the group of 14 European countries which have included media literacy in their legal provisions. As part of the Plan for Monitoring of Trends stemming from the Media Literacy Program, media literacy “Surveys among the adult population in the Republic of Macedonia” were conducted in 2016 and 2019.⁴⁴ Methodologically, the media literacy levels are measured according to the guidelines of the EU Directive every three years.⁴⁵

37 Media Literacy Network (2021), “What is MMP” ?, available at <https://mediumskapismenost.mk/shto-e-mmp/> accessed on 15.01.2022.

38 Media Literacy Network (2021), “Members of the Network”, available at <https://mediumskapismenost.mk/clenki-na-mrezata/> accessed on 15.01.2022.

39 Media Literacy Network (2021), Projects, available at <https://mediumskapismenost.mk/proekti/> accessed on 15.01.2022.

40 Media Literacy Network (2021) “Media Literacy Days 2021 - Virtual or Real - the rules are the same!”, available at <https://mediumskapismenost.mk/?p=5092>, accessed on 15.01.2022.

41 “The document clearly emphasizes the need to promote media literacy as greatest interest of the Macedonian society, a process in which educational institutions should be involved with mechanisms for checking the effects of the media education in the curricula. There should be also involvement of media professionals by developing self-regulatory codes related to compliance with professional standards for increasing their responsibility in creating media products, regulatory bodies in the field of media and electronic communications by developing special programs with multiple activities related to media literacy, civil society representatives with various initiatives and projects as well as scientific institutions with research in this area”, Sopar V, Kjupeva T. and Temenugova, A (2016) “Media Literacy in Macedonia: the missing link for active citizenship”, Institute for Communication Studies, Skopje, p. 18.

42 Source: Agency for Audio and Audio-visual Media Services (2019), “Regulatory Strategy for Development of Audio and Audiovisual Activity for the period 2019 - 2023, 2019”, available at <https://avmu.mk/strategija-na-razvoj/> accessed on 15.01.2022.

43 Agency for Audio and Audio-visual Media Services (2019), “Regulatory strategy for development of audio and audiovisual activity for the period 2019 - 2023, 2019”, p. 12.

44 Agency for Audio and Audio-visual Media Services (2019), “Survey of media literacy among adult population in the Republic of Macedonia for 2016 and 2019”, available at: <https://mediumskapismenost.mk/kampanja-dvapati-proveri-ednash-veruvaj/>

45 It can be noted that the Agency for Audio and Audio-visual Media Services follows a different methodology for measuring competencies in media literacy, based on the methods developed by EAVI under the direction of the European Commission.

In other analyzed documents, such as national programs and development strategies, media literacy is often mentioned indirectly by using notions like *information literacy* or *digital literacy*. The Education Strategy for 2018-2025 and the Action Plan⁴⁶ of the Ministry of Education and Science does not mention media literacy, but ICT and digital literacy concepts instead: “Flexible forms of learning and forms of lifelong learning using ICT are integrated into the existing system. Continuous digital literacy is provided to all professions by adjusting it to the specific professional needs. Students who have dropped out of school and the unemployed have access to digital literacy”.⁴⁷

As noted in the analysis by Shopar et al. (2016, p. 19) “The document does not define digital literacy as, for example, ability to use digital technologies, as communication tools or networks for locating, evaluating, using and creating information, or as the ability to understand and to use information in multiple formats from the wide range of sources shown through computers”. ICT and digital literacy are mainly mentioned in the context of digitalization of the teaching process, but digital literacy as such remains something that is insufficiently defined and specified.

The “National Cyber Security Strategy of the Republic of North Macedonia 2018 - 2022”⁴⁸ of the Ministry of Information Society and Administration, the chapter on “Cyber Security Culture” reads: “Promoting cyber security culture means encouraging accountability and understanding of the cyber risks in all areas of society, by developing informed trust of users in the electronic services, as well as by improving knowledge on how to protect their personal data”⁴⁹. Cyber security i.e. safe use of digital platforms and tools has certain overlaps with media, information, and digital literacy. The same document continues: “The exchange of skills, knowledge and experience in cyber security at the national level will be achieved through the creation of ad-hoc cross-sectoral research teams composed of experts from the public sector, the private sector and the academic community”.⁵⁰ The action plan for this strategy envisages, *inter alia*, education and training of the primary and secondary school educators about cyber security and provision of appropriate and contemporary materials for students, development and distribution of educational materials to target groups, creation of an e-learning platform, raising awareness and essential knowledge about the cyber security of primary and secondary school students, as well as supporting initiatives, campaigns, conferences, workshops and seminars in the field of cyber security for the general public⁵¹.

46 “General topics related to the overall education system covered in the special 7th pillar: Legislation, statistics and information on education, ICT and digital literacy, social partnership, national qualifications framework”. Source: Ministry of Education and Science (2018), “Education Strategy for 2018-2025 and Action Plan”, available at <https://mon.gov.mk/download/?f=strategija-za-obrazovanieto-2018-2025.docx>, accessed on 15.01.2022, p. 64

47 Source: Ministry of Education and Science (2018), “Education Strategy for 2018-2025 and Action Plan”, available at <https://mon.gov.mk/download/?f=strategija-za-obrazovanieto-2018-2025.docx>, accessed on 15.01.2022, “Education Strategy for 2018 - 2025 and Action Plan”, p. 67.

48 Ministry of Information Society and Administration (2018), “National Strategy and Action Plan for Cyber Security of the Republic of North Macedonia 2018 - 2022”, available at <https://www.mioa.gov.mk/?q=mk/node/1813>, accessed on 15.01.2022.

49 Ministry of Information Society and Administration (2018), “National Strategy and Action Plan for Cyber Security of the Republic of North Macedonia 2018 - 2022”, available at <https://www.mioa.gov.mk/?q=mk/node/1813> accessed on 15.01.2022, p. 25.

50 Ministry of Information Society and Administration (2018), “National Strategy and Action Plan for Cyber Security of the Republic of North Macedonia 2018 - 2022”, available at <https://www.mioa.gov.mk/?q=mk/node/1813> accessed on 15.01.2022, p. 25-26

51 Ministry of Information Society and Administration (2018), “Action Plan for Cyber Security of the Republic of North Macedonia 2018 - 2022”, p. 9-10.

The review and analysis of the documents and materials showed that the strategies and the activities of the institutions include various different elements of media, digital and information literacy; what is lacking is an integrated and coordinated approach that would improve the efficiency of specific activities and provide better solutions to the existing problems in this field. Missing also is a clear integration of the media literacy concept, which is either absent or is substituted with other related concepts, such as digital literacy, which cannot be fully identified with the broad approach of media literacy.

Civic sector and promotion of media literacy

It goes without saying that the civil society sector and the international and non-governmental organizations significantly contribute to the activities of promoting, supporting and fostering media literacy in the Republic of North Macedonia. In addition to the fact that civil society organizations are members of the Media Literacy Network, a number of those, as well as others, perform notable activities on media literacy.⁵² Most of these activities include training with teachers and students, preparation of educational materials in various formats (printed and electronic), seminars, conferences, fora, research papers and analysis.

Media literacy in the formal education

With the start of the academic year 2021/2022 and as per the new concept of the Ministry of Education and Science (MES)⁵³, certain elements of media literacy were included in some aching subjects in primary schools. More specifically, five compulsory chapters and several selective ones have been included in the curricula for the first to ninth grades. According to the Ministry of Education and Science, for the time being, introducing it as a separate subject is not planned, so as to “avoid to increase the number of subjects for the students”.⁵⁴ This is mostly an organizational-technical reason the sustainability of which should be reconsidered. As a part of this change, appropriate training for teachers are planned, mainly because the insufficient number and variety of trainings for teachers have always been pointed out as a problem.⁵⁵

The analysis of the curricula in primary and secondary education differentiated several findings which largely overlap with the reports on Macedonia in the last decade:

- There is no separate subject for media and media literacy in the curricula;

52 More details in Shopar et al., 2016, and here we can mention the following organizations that have long-term engagement and projects in this area: Macedonian Institute for Media, Institute for Communication Studies (formerly named High School of Journalism and Public Relations), Youth Education Forum, IREX, USAID, OSCE Mission to Skopje, International Organization for Migration, Metamorphosis, Institute for Democracy Societas Civilis, Makedox, Council for Media Ethics, Center for Media Development, IDEA Southeast and Europe and many others.

53 Ministry of Education and Science (2020), “Draft Concept for Primary Education”, available at <https://mon.gov.mk/stored/document/Koncepcija%20-%20makedonski%20jazyk.pdf> accessed on 15.01.2022.

54 “I am confident and I think that media literacy should not be a separate subject. We need less subjects with more content, and not more subjects because our children do not learn to think and reason critically and all this should be introduced in all subjects” Mila Carovska, Minister of Education and Science, Radio MOF (2020), “The media literacy in education will start to be introduced in the next school year, and teachers will have a key role.” <https://www.radiomof.mk/mediumskata-pismenost-vo-obrazovanieto-kje-pochne-da-se-voveduva-idnata-uchebna-godina-nastavnicite-kje-imaat-kluchna-uloga/> accessed on 15.01.2022.

55 Sopar, V., Temenugova, A., Aksentievskaja, M. (2018), “Media Literacy in Macedonia: An Attempt for Implementation in Primary Education”, School of Journalism and Public Relations, Skopje, p. 55.

- Media related topics are included in several compulsory or elective subjects, such as: Mother Tongue (Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish, Serbian, Bosnian, from the first to ninth grade in primary education and in the first to fourth year of secondary education in some of these languages) with 10-12 hours per year⁵⁶, Life Skills⁵⁷ (from first to third, from fourth to sixth and from seventh to ninth grade), Society (fourth grade), Creativity (elective subject, fourth grade), Computer Work and Basics of Programming (third, fourth and fifth grade), IT Projects (elective subject, seventh and eighth grade) and Civic Education (eighth or ninth grade, depending on the type of the curriculum).

The media culture program, within the subject Mother Tongue, includes the following topics:

- **First grade:** Various types of media shows (television and radio), types of cartoons (includes puppets and animated) as well as an introduction to topics such as movies, series for children, theater, drama, and children's magazines.
- **Second grade:** Television content, children's press, magazines, and newspapers.
- **Third grade:** Radio, radio shows, TV shows, Internet search.
- **Fourth grade:** Types of TV shows (educational, scientific and popular, entertaining, etc.).
- **Fifth grade:** Film, theater, music and scenography.
- **Sixth grade:** types of media (electronic, print, online), sections in the media, the process of creating media content (director, scenographer, actor, etc.).
- **Seventh grade:** Types of movies by content and purpose, positive and negative impacts of movies and other media formats such as news and press releases, etc.
- **Eighth grade:** Film, screenplay, characters.
- **Ninth grade:** Dominantly film and television production topics.

Furthermore, the subject of Society includes topics about the different ways of being informed through the media today. Certain curricula include exercises, such as analysis of newspaper headlines or interpreting of editorials.

Two classes of Civil Society are dedicated to "Media in a Democratic Society".

Computer Work and the Basics of Programming includes the topic of Online Living, which teaches the students topics related to being informed via the Internet, data search, links, searching and browsing multimedia content (video, audio, etc.).

The subject Life Skills defines more clearly the teaching units which coincide with the concept of media literacy to a greater extent: development of critical attitude towards media, the relevance of information and media content to different age groups, useful and harmful content, comparison and sources of information, media and people's rights and so on.

The secondary education in the Republic of North Macedonia gave occasional impetus to media literacy, mainly as a result of the education reform processes which envisaged digitalization and integration of the new digital technologies in the teaching process. The introduction of these technologies implied a change in the teaching approach which required a greater interaction with the students, as well as a shift of focus from a reproduction of information to effective use of information and problem-solving.

56 "In this subject, in which students usually learn about the types of media (radio, television, press, online newspapers), the specifics of different media content and expressions (radio dramas, TV show, film, performance drama, etc.) and programs (informative, entertaining, educational), Shopar, V., Kjupeva T. and Temenugova, A. (2016) "Media Literacy in Macedonia: The Missing Link for Active Citizenship", Institute for Communication Studies, Skopje, p. 46.

57 It is a curriculum that is implemented in different ways in all development cycles, except in the first grade.

As part of the reforms, the analysis and research have shown that the most significant steps forward as far as media literacy is concerned, have been noted in the following subjects: Mother Tongue and Literature, Sociology, Psychology, Informatics, Programming Languages, Civic Culture, Innovation and Entrepreneurship, Speaking and Writing, Pedagogy and Arts Culture.

Just like the findings in primary education, media literacy is neither terminologically nor conceptually included in the secondary education system. The Law on Secondary Education gives an extensive elaboration of the process of utilizing ICT technologies, however, it does so from a dominantly technical aspect; it does not, however, mention media literacy as an educational unit and concept.

In reference to the subjects in secondary schools, which cover a broader content of media literacy as a topic, the following thematic units more germane to media literacy can be noted:

- Mother Tongue (first and fourth year of gymnasium high school education, second year of vocational education): Types of communication systems, functional language styles present in the media (journalistic functional style), types of communication (professional, practical).
- Informatics (first year of gymnasium high school education): History of the Internet and how it works, theoretical aspects of social media, privacy and personal data.
- Information Technology (second year of gymnasium high school education): Creating websites.
- Innovation and Entrepreneurship (first, second and third year of gymnasium high school education): Business communication, marketing, ICT communication systems, internet marketing, branding, internet promotion.
- Sociology (first and third year of gymnasium high school education): Globalization and the media, including mass media.
- Psychology (fourth year): Impact of technology on psychical development.
- Arts: Visual communication, design, computer graphics, photography.
- Speaking and Writing (second year of gymnasium high school education): Forms of speech expression (commenting, dialogue, debate).
- Pedagogy (third year): Types of communications.
- Civic Education (fourth year vocational education): democratic societies and information, globalization, mass media.
- Life Skills (first, second, third and fourth year): media influences, social media, advertisements, political communication, critical attitude towards media.
- Business (third year of gymnasium high school education): Ethics in communication.

The general conclusion is this material is both useful and needed in the education process on these two levels of education, but obviously more in-depth content is missing to enrich and modernize the curricula. A finer integration of the basic media literacy concepts is lacking, so that it can be applied in education and other activities in a concise and effective manner. Topics dispersion, discontinuity of the learning process as well as fragmentation of secondary school types (gymnasium or vocational) also prevail. It should be noted, however, that this teaching content is a solid foundation for further expansion, improvement and upgrade, the elements which media literacy can consolidate and raise to a higher level of education.

Media literacy is one of the most important literacies of the 21st century. In R.N. Macedonia, however, it is not yet on the priority list of higher education policymakers. Despite the ambitious reforms in primary education (especially during 2020/2021) and the implementation of media literacy as a topic taught in all subjects, as well as its successive continuation in secondary education, media literacy in higher education remains to be a terminological dilemma. The initial steps in reviving the concept of media literacy are “enthusiastically” expected in 2021/2022 and in the following academic year 2022/2023, through including this topic in specific study curricula.

4.1. Normative framework and strategic documents

Since the independence of the country, higher education has undergone a serious process of reforms, the greatest one taking place in 2003 when the ratification of the Bologna Declaration, meant an approximation to the European education standards; in other words, promotion of a common system of studies (undergraduate, postgraduate, doctoral), the establishment of credit transfer system (student mobility), cooperation between European higher education institutions, lifelong learning, diploma nostrifications, better employment opportunities. This, of course, presumed revision and modernization of the existing curricula. These changes led to many follow-up amendments to the Law on Higher Education – the most recent one being in 2018⁵⁸. The Law explicitly stipulates harmonization with European directives in the field of mutual recognition of professional qualifications that regulate the minimum duration of higher education studies for the sectoral professions in the European Union.⁵⁹ In that context, we should mention the National Framework of Higher Education Qualifications which determines the profile, objectives and starting points for the formation of study programs from the first, second and third cycle of studies, as well as study programs for vocational education that are shorter than three years.⁶⁰

58 Law on Higher Education, 2018, <https://mon.gov.mk/stored/document/Zakon%20za%20visokoto%20obrazovanie%20NOV.pdf>

59 Directive 2005/36 / EC of the European Parliament on the recognition of professional qualifications, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32005L0036>; Directive 2013/55 / EU of the European Parliament <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32013L0055>

60 National Framework of Higher Education Qualifications <http://www.slvesnik.com.mk/Issues/89987333AA56E54989DD0CB3773E2C5B.pdf#page=16>

The Education Strategy with the Action Plan 2018-2025 of the Ministry of Education and Science stands out as an important document in the education sector⁶¹ aimed at improving the quality of education, the infrastructure of the education system, human resource capacities, as well as “development of generic and key competencies in students so they can develop into critical subjects who are active and relevant participants in the social life.” This requires development of steps and tools for incorporation of: generic competencies - for critical thinking and making reasoned decisions, ability to solve problems and apply knowledge in real situations, for interpersonal and intrapersonal social and emotional skills; including key competencies - to learn how to learn, innovation and entrepreneurship, civic and social responsibility, cultural awareness and expression, simultaneously with the key competencies for communication in the mother tongue and a foreign language, mathematics, natural sciences and technology, and digital competence. Undoubtedly, these are competencies acquired also through media education, although the Strategy does not explicitly note this as such.

The focus is on *information literacy*, with the emphasis being put on the need to intensify the use of ICT in education by establishing an e-learning portal and learning management system as well as through continuous training of the staff on how to use new technologies and ICT tools in the education. One of the objectives of the Strategy is to create the basis for designing and “developing an integrated reform which will encompass the whole education” - from preschool to higher education, as a process and opportunity for lifelong learning, in which the levels of education will follow logically and successively.⁶²

Currently, the most important document which treats media and information literacy as an indispensable and integral part of the education process is the Concept for Primary Education (2021) of the Ministry of Education and Science.⁶³ It includes key areas such as: mastering basic skills (math, language literacy and science) including digital competencies, mastering transversal skills such as critical thinking, entrepreneurship, creativity and civic activism through approaches that are transcendental, student-centered and challenge-based, fostering language learning and multilingualism in order to ensure mobility in education and the labor market and facilitate the surmounting of cultural barriers in today’s Europe, embracing European perspective in education as complementary to national and regional perspectives in order to provide insight into the European values and European everyday life.

The need for a change in primary schools is aimed at “teaching and learning process which would develop analytical and critical thinking, encourage creativity, would facilitate recognition of true and false information and the understanding that proper use of information is far more valuable than owning the information. Furthermore, lifelong learning competencies, especially those related to skills for creative expression, critical thinking, communication and collaboration, should be integrated into all curricula and be part of every lesson, in the same way as linguistic or arithmetic literacy. The core of the “new education” is the digital integration, but not by a mere “adding” the ICT into the existing teaching methods, but by learning on digital platforms or by distance learning, as well as by supporting the inclusion of children with disabilities in regular classes. The teaching will implement an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approach i.e. inter-curricular study of media and information literacy.

61 Education Strategy with Action Plan 2018-2025

<http://mrk.mk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Strategija-za-obrazovanie-MAK-WEB.pdf>

62 The previous National Program for Development of Education in the Republic of Macedonia 2005-2015 also emphasized the importance of computer literacy among young people and adults i.e. the knowledge of how to work with information and computer technology (ICT) as an essential part of the competencies of the young and the adults as a prerequisite for their effective implementation in the area of labor and social and political life.

63 Concept for Primary Education. <https://mon.gov.mk/stored/document/Koncepcija%20MK.pdf>

The earliest reforms started in the academic year 2021/2022; firstly, in the first and fourth grade with new curricula. The whole nine-year primary education will undergo reforms in phases within the next five years.

In this context, the National Cyber Security Strategy of the Republic of Macedonia 2018-2022 of the Ministry of Information Society and Administration should be mentioned⁶⁴. It highlights five key areas of cyber-security, designed to increase cyber threat defense capabilities and increase cyber security in all sectors and at all levels. In the section on Cyber Capacities and Culture of Cyber Security, the following activities, among others, are highlighted: development and promotion of curricula and trainings on cyber security at all levels, raising awareness and essential knowledge of cyber security for students in primary and secondary schools, upgrade of the existing curricula in primary and secondary schools and inclusion of cyber security elements in the new university study programs in order to have staff which is better educated in cyber security, raising of awareness and essential knowledge on cyber security among citizens and civil society organizations.

4.2. The structure of universities and faculties in the country

There are 24 accredited higher education institutions⁶⁵ in N.Macedonia, of which six are public, one is private-public and eleven are private universities; two (private) faculties and four (private) high schools. The largest and the oldest of them is the public University “St. Cyril and Methodius” (UKIM)⁶⁶ with 23 faculties, most of which are “micro universities” that include several institutes, departments or study programs⁶⁷; the youngest public University “Mother Teresa” was founded in 2015 and started its operation in the academic year 2016/2017. The oldest and the largest private university is FON University with 8 faculties, each of them covering several study programs.⁶⁸

Many of the higher education institutions offer study programs in the field of media, communications, journalism and information technologies. Media literacy, however, is not a separate subject, either as compulsory or as elective. The first changes are expected this year and in the academic year 2022/2023. As of the academic year 2021/2022, media literacy will be offered for the first time as an elective subject at the Faculty of Pedagogy at the University “St. Kliment Ohridski” from Bitola, within the study program for Social and Rehabilitation Pedagogy (in the fourth year of studies).⁶⁹ The subject “Media Literacy and Media Culture” is planned to be introduced at the Faculty of Philosophy at the University “Ss. Cyril and Methodius” in the new accreditation application of the Institute of Pedagogy for 2022/2023.

64 National Cyber Security Strategy of the Republic of Macedonia 2018-2022 https://www.mioa.gov.mk/sites/default/files/pbl_files/documents/strategies/ns_sajber_bezbednost_2018-2022.pdf

65 Accredited higher education institutions from the Ministry of Education and Science of R.N. Macedonia -<https://mon.gov.mk/page/?id=2047>

66 The University was established in 1949 with three faculties. Today it has 23 faculties, 5 scientific institutes, 4 public scientific institutions - associate members, 1 associate member - other higher education institution and 7 associate members - other organizations. More at: http://www.ukim.edu.mk/mk_struktura.php

67 The Faculty of Philosophy has 12 institutes, the Faculty of Philology has 11 departments, the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics has 7 institutes, the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences and Food has 9 study programs, the Faculty of Economics has 7 departments, the Faculty of Information Sciences and Computer Engineering has 7 study programs. Almost all have a number of separate study programs. More at: http://www.ukim.edu.mk/dokumenti_m/Studiski-programi-I_ciklus-2021.pdf

68 The University was established in 2003 as a Faculty of Social Sciences; it became FON University in 2005 with the introduction of new academic fields and in 2020 it became the American University of Europe (UEE-FON).

69 This is a new program (accredited in 2020) and refers to students enrolled in the academic year 2021/2022. Source: <https://pfbt.uklo.edu.mk/studii/prv-ciklus/>

It is a similar situation at the Faculty of Languages, Cultures and Communications at the South-East Europe University in Tetovo, where Media Literacy is introduced as a mandatory subject in the first cycle, while Digital Literacy is introduced in the second cycle of studies. It is introduced within the study program for international communications starting from the academic year 2022/2023. These subjects are also offered as elective subjects in other study programs of this University.⁷⁰ Media literacy is also a compulsory subject at the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University “Mother Teresa”, that is, in the Media and Intercultural Communication study program (Department of Culture, Department of Communication and Department of Media and Journalism) starting from the academic year 2022/2023.⁷¹ In other higher education institutions, the subjects which have the closest relevance to literacy (i.e. they are present with a set of methodological units) include Media and Education, Media Culture, Education and Media Culture, Media Relations, Media and Communications, Media, Society and Networking, Media and Society, Mass Media, Social Media, New Media Education and so on. In this context, the following faculties and study programs should be singled out:

Faculty of Law - UKIM, Journalism Studies with subjects such as Theories of Journalism, Media and Globalization, Communication, Public Opinion, New Media, Sociology of Communications (compulsory), Reporting in Journalism, Investigative Journalism, E-Journalism (elective); Political studies with subjects such as Public Opinion and Mass Communication, Globalization, Rhetoric (compulsory); *Public relations* with subjects such as: Political Propaganda and Persuasion, Media Relations, Public Opinion (compulsory).

- **Faculty of Philosophy - UKIM**, Institute of Sociology, with subjects such as Sociology of Mass Communications, Media and Education, Media and Audience Research, New Media and Digital Culture (compulsory), Media Culture (elective).

- **Faculty of Information Sciences and Computer Engineering (FINKI) - UKIM**, study programs: Internet, Networks and Security, Computer Education, Computer Science, Computer Engineering, Information Technology Application, Software Engineering & Information Systems, Software Engineering and Information Systems with subjects such as Social Media and Media, Media and Communications (elective).

- **Faculty of Law - UGD** (public University “Goce Delchev” Shtip): media studies and public relations that include teaching subjects such as Introduction to Journalism, History of Journalism, Freedom of Media and Expression, Media Law and Ethics, Basics of Communication, Report Journalism, Media, Society and Networking, Media Genres, Public and Public Opinion, Writing in Print Media (compulsory).

- **Faculty of Law - SUT** (State University of Tetovo): study program in journalism with subjects such as Theories in Journalism, Media and Society, Communicology, Media Production; study program in political science with subjects such as Political Institutions, Political Systems.

- **Faculty of Social Sciences - UMT (Mother Teresa University Skopje)**: study program in Media and Communications - communications with subjects such as Basics of Mass Communication, Democracy and New Media, Media and Globalization, Sociology of Media/

70 The new program in international communications is in the process of accreditation and has already received initial approval.

Source: interview with the Dean of the Faculty of Languages, Cultures and Communications at SEEU, Tetovo.

71 According to the elaborate for the Faculty of Social Affairs, the media literacy subject is present in all three departments - media and journalism, communication and culture; the remaining subjects in the field of journalism will be also updated, such as Fake News. These subjects will be offered as optional at other faculties of this University. Source: interview with a professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences at UMT, Skopje

Communication (compulsory), Media and Society, Internet - Basics of Communication, On-line Journalism and Social Media (optional), study program for Media and Communications Journalism with subjects such as Basics of Mass Communication, Media and Globalization (compulsory), Democracy and New Media, Media and Society, Online Journalism and Social Media (elective).

– **Faculty of Languages, Cultures and Communications – SEEU** (public-private University of Southeast Europe - Tetovo): study program in international communications with subjects such as Communication Theories, Media Writing and Reporting, Political Communication, International Media, Social media (compulsory), Persuasion, Communication Ethics, Media and Society, Argumentation and Debate (elective).

– **Faculty of Communications – MBU** (Private International Balkan University - Skopje): study program in new media and communications with subjects such as Communication Skills, Introduction to New Media, History of Communications and Media, Introduction to Social Media, New Media and the Society, Analysis of Social Media, Human-Computer Interaction (compulsory), New Media Education, Mass Media (elective), Public Relations study program with subjects such as Communication Skills, Communication Theories, Introduction to Social Media, Mass Media, Media and Society, Digital Communication, Communication and Persuasion (compulsory), New Media Education, Political Communication (elective).

– **Faculty of Political Science – UACS** (American College University Skopje): study program in psychology with subjects such as Media and Politics, Public Relations, Oral Communication (elective), *study program in international relations and diplomacy* with subjects such as Media and Politics, Oral Communication (elective).

– A separate group consists of the faculties of pedagogy and the study programs for the education of future teachers, educators and pedagogues who are then integrated into the system of preschool education, primary and secondary education and who are to actively participate in the implementation of media literacy in the education process. They also follow the curricula in primary education (especially in Media Culture)

– **Faculty of Philosophy – UKIM, Institute of Pedagogy** within subjects such as Media Culture, ICT in teaching (compulsory).

– **Faculty of Pedagogy “St. Kliment Ohridski” – UKIM**, study program for preschool education within the subject Media Culture (elective), study program for grade teaching within the subject Media Culture subject (elective), study program in librarianship within the subject Media Culture (elective).

– **Faculty of Educational Sciences – UGD**, study program in primary school grade teaching within the subjects Education and Media Culture, ICT in teaching (elective), *study program in pedagogy* within the Education and Media Culture (elective).

– **Faculty of Pedagogy – UKLO** (public University “St. Kliment Ohridski” Bitola), study program in social and rehabilitation pedagogy within the Media Literacy (elective), study program in translation, English language and literature and Macedonian language and literature within the Media Culture (elective).

– **Faculty of Pedagogy – SUT** (State University of Tetovo), study program for primary school teaching within subjects such as Symmetric Communication, Communication Strategies, Communication Skills, study program in pedagogy within subjects such as Concepts of Lifelong Learning, Effective Communication, Educational culture (elective).

4.3. Media literacy in the academic field in the country

Judging from the total number of universities, faculties, professors and students, the academic community in N. Macedonia is quite respectable.⁷² The students can choose their future profession from a variety of study programs - technical, humanities and social sciences. Hardly will anyone, especially those who will opt for studies in communications, media, journalism or pedagogical studies, find the subject “Media Literacy” in the program; what they will find is a substitute subject (such as Media Culture) or, some of its methodological units included into other similar subjects. In contrast, media literacy has been increasingly replaced lately by “Media and Information Literacy” or “Media-Information Literacy” (especially UNESCO). Where do we as a country that has embraced European standards of education, stand in this regard and what do the professors and students think about it?

4.4. Professors and the media literacy

Professors have no doubts that the concept of media literacy must be an integral part of the education system in the country. “It is about functional literacy in the age we live in, whether we call it media, information or digital literacy.”⁷³ Globally, this is equivalent to linguistic literacy. The Council of Europe has incorporated it into the institutional framework as an integral part of the regulation and policies in education, lifelong learning, media and information society.

The implementation of media literacy in higher education in N. Macedonia is inevitable, as young people - future participants in the global labor market, need to live, study and work in a digital environment. Professors agree that it is needed in all phases of education, starting from the earliest phase (primary education) through the secondary and higher education. Children start using the media at the age of 6, before even starting school and before learning the alphabet. So the foundations should be laid in primary and secondary education, and continue in higher education, so that whatever may be missed in the early levels of education can now be compensated and also, because of the fact that the information and communication technologies and the media advance rapidly. This is a “staircase” approach, starting with educational materials and storytelling for the little ones, followed by teaching decision-making in various situations, observation and social phenomena and process analysis; in secondary school it continues with interdisciplinary teaching, by transferring viewpoints from one sphere into another and a critical analysis; at the university this knowledge is enhanced and is followed by specialization studies, depending on the profession.⁷⁴ There must be a continuity. **“Media literacy should therefore be seen as something which is constantly changing and a part of lifelong learning.”**⁷⁵

72 According to the State Statistical Office, a total of 50,881 students were enrolled in higher vocational schools and faculties in the academic year 2020/2021; 51,734 students in 2019/2020 and 53,677 students in 2018/2019. Source: <https://www.stat.gov.mk/PrethodniSoopstenijaOblast.aspx?id=29> On the other hand, there were a total of 4,288 teachers and teaching associates in higher education institutions in the academic year 2020/2021 in the country, 4,437 in 2019/2020 and 4,323 in 2018/2019. Source: <https://www.stat.gov.mk/PrethodniSoopstenijaOblast.aspx?id=22&rbrObl=5>

73 Statement of a professor at the Faculty of Law in Skopje, UKIM; studies in Journalism and Political studies, interview conducted on 03.12.2021.

74 Statement of a professor at the Faculty of Information Sciences and Computer Engineering at UKIM Skopje, interview conducted on 03.12.2021.

75 Statement of a professor at the International Balkan University - Skopje, interview conducted on 10.12.2021.

The Education Strategy 2018-2025 (developed with the support of the European Commission for Education) sets the national standards for the national education system. It outlines the basis for a realistic identification of the manner and the extent of studying media literacy. What remains to be done now is: **“...a concept which will clearly define media literacy within the education system. What is media literacy in primary education? What is media literacy in secondary education? What is media literacy in higher education? “What is IT literacy?”**⁷⁶ It is a systematic, comprehensive process that should take place within the line ministry, but the definition of the methods and techniques, depending on the specific type of education, must be left to universities and faculties,⁷⁷ according to their **“academic independence in the preparation of the study programs and hence taking the initiative to identify forms and ways of introducing media literacy through an accreditation procedure.”**⁷⁸

One of the key challenges for media literacy arises in the context of digitalization. “We use technologies that interact with certain content, audiences, sources, and we cannot see the implications of the products generated through this interaction. Media literacy is such a big problem only due to the present IT illiteracy. Utilization of digital tools in education is the best way to learn more about media literacy.”⁷⁹ At the same time, the faculties, instead of having the best hardware and software, work with some interactive whiteboards or in modest rooms in which they teach informatics. In addition, the reforms in education have until now been inconsistent and have often ended in partial and insignificant results.

However, when it comes to the specific discipline in which media literacy should be studied in higher education, professors have different opinions. Most of them believe that media literacy belongs to the social sciences and humanities. They emphasize the studies in journalism and communications, sociology and pedagogy, and especially the faculties of pedagogy (mainly for homeroom teaching in primary schools) where media literacy would be a compulsory subject, so that “literate teachers can teach and create literate students”.⁸⁰ Thus, “by acquiring full pedagogical, psychological, didactic-methodological literacy and culture, once these students become professors themselves, they could pass on that literacy to the next generation of students.”⁸¹ At other faculties, media literacy should be studied as a learning tool in a “dispersed manner”, that is, in several related subjects teaching the students how to create a critical attitude and how to use the media as a tool in their life and work, thus avoiding the current situation of relinquishing to the enthusiasm and social responsibility of the professors who deal with this topic”.⁸²

There is also the viewpoint that “media literacy should be viewed in an integrated way, which means that every teacher, professor or educator should include certain aspects of media literacy within the subject they teach, because the textbooks are not the sole source of knowledge in any teaching subject. “⁸³ This means that phones, laptops, pictures, videos should be used for writing, presentations, speaking, and that this is a multidisciplinary way of intertwining several disciplines. We are talking about a dynamic multi-layered and multi-purpose process. Maybe that is why multi-literacy is so intensively talked about.

76 Statement of a professor at the Faculty of Educational Sciences at the University “Goce Delchev” - Shtip, interview conducted on 03.12.2021.

77 Statement of a professor at the Faculty of Political Science at the University American College Skopje, interview conducted on 10.12.2021.

78 Statement of a professor at the Faculty of Pedagogy “Kliment Ohridski” - Skopje, interview conducted on 10.12.2021.

79 Statement of a professor at the Faculty of Political Science at the University American College Skopje, interview conducted on 10.12.2021.

80 Statement of a professor Faculty of Philosophy, Institute of Pedagogy, UKIM, interview conducted on 04.12.2021.

81 Statement of a professor at the Faculty of Pedagogy at the State University - Tetovo, interview conducted on 09.12.2021

82 Statement of a professor at the Faculty of Law at UKIM, studies in journalism and political studies, interview conducted on 03.12.2021.

83 Statement of a professor at the Faculty of Philosophy at UKIM, at the Institute of Pedagogy, interview conducted on 04.12.2021.

“We live in a digital age and whether we like it or not, we have to keep up with the times. Media is becoming more and more an integral part of our profession and our daily lives, and we will all have to learn to live with it.”⁸⁴ It can even be said without exaggeration that “we are already digital units.”⁸⁵ Hence the argument for media literacy as an integral part of all faculties:

“In a situation when applied knowledge is required, when teaching is restructured with project activities, research and integration of knowledge and skills from different fields; and when the use of electronic media content, digital libraries and various digital tools and platforms is inevitable, media literacy becomes the basic literacy of the modern man - as is the ability to read.”⁸⁶

In that sense, regardless of whether media literacy is implemented as a separate subject at the faculties and universities or not, it is still “practiced” in a number of study programs in various methodological units. The approach of interpretation and analysis of different contents is regularly present in the teaching process. There is almost no subject (especially in the media and pedagogical area) where students do not analyze, compare, evaluate and critically review information. It is an integral part of lectures and exercises, in which students “independently select media content and make critical analysis”⁸⁷, “prepare and present project tasks with critical analysis of media content (disinformation, manipulations)”⁸⁸ or “essays with media references (newspapers, blogs, articles) and critical reviews”.⁸⁹

In their seminar papers (about the social media, television and their impact) the students “explore trending topics”,⁹⁰ “make critical analysis of specific issues and problems and are involved in various forums, debates, workshops.”⁹¹ Exercises in which they “compare and analyze the same information presented on different Internet portals” are also no exception.⁹² Trending topics and issues (such as disinformation) and “problematic contents of the new media during the exercises are discussed with experts - journalists from practice.”⁹³ They are also engaged in “independent processing of a current event, recording it, textually corroborating it and posting that material on the website of the school, as a model for primary school students.”⁹⁴ During the exercises, they “analyze journalistic texts and distinguish information from commentary, whether there are more information sources, who the author of the text is, they assess how the specific medium content is treated, what is missing in terms of objectivity, truthfulness, ethics.”⁹⁵

84 Statement of a professor of the study program in Media and Intercultural Communication at UMT - Skopje, interview conducted on 08.12.2021.

85 Statement of a professor of international communications at SEEU - Tetovo, interview conducted on 09.12.2021.

86 Statement of a professor at the Faculty of Pedagogy “Kliment Ohridski” at UKIM - Skopje, interview conducted on 20.12.2021.

87 Statement of a professor at the Faculty of Pedagogy “Kliment Ohridski” - Skopje, as well as the position of professors at the Faculty of Pedagogy - Bitola, interview conducted on 20.12.2021.

88 Statement of a professor at the Faculty of Law, media studies at the University “Goce Delchev” from Shtip, interview conducted on 03.12.2021

89 Statement of a professor at the Faculty of Information Sciences and Computer Engineering at UKIM, interview conducted on 03.12.2021.

90 Statement of a professor at the Faculty of Philosophy at UKIM, Institute of Pedagogy, interview conducted on 04.12.2021.

91 Statement of a professor at the International Balkan University - Skopje, interview conducted on 10.12.2021.

92 Statement of a professor at the Faculty of Law, media studies at the University “Goce Delchev” from Shtip, interview conducted on 13.12.2021.

93 Statement of a professor at the Faculty of Law, studies in journalism at UKIM - Skopje, interview conducted on 03.12.2021.

94 Statement of a professor at the Faculty of Educational Sciences at the University “Goce Delchev” - Shtip, interview conducted on 03.12.2021.

95 Statement of a professor of the study program in international communications at SEEU - Tetovo, interview conducted on 09.12.2021

They also have at their disposal a student radio, a student television, a media laboratory where they make short films on a certain topic.⁹⁶ To summarize:

“The introduction of Media Literacy subject in the study programs is a kind of bypass problem-solving in cardiology. This means that an intellectual always analyzes and compares and never takes anything for granted. If we as an education system, manage to produce quality staff in every profession, it means that that staff will learn to think. And the global trend is not just to collect information like a computer, but to teach the student to manage the information. If we have such intellectuals, then we will also have media literate people.”⁹⁷

In terms of the research work related to media literacy, the teaching staff is involved in these activities in different ways, but frequently individually and insufficiently. Usually, we are talking about cooperation in projects implemented by non-governmental organizations (through memoranda of cooperation) and various engagements as professors in the field.⁹⁸ Experiences vary - from participating in projects by preparing educational material against fake news, disinformation and cyber security (for primary education),⁹⁹ multicultural and interethnic integration projects with campaigns and trainings,¹⁰⁰ projects for prevention of cyber violence, peer violence with training for teachers and pedagogues, psychologists, students from various schools and parents,¹⁰¹ projects for protecting children from online bullying and other forms of cyberbullying¹⁰², to projects related to the revision of existing study programs and incorporation of subjects in the field of media literacy.¹⁰³ Efforts are also being made to engage students as well, at least through training if not otherwise.

4.5. Inclusiveness in the education system

One needs to mention the inclusiveness, it being the strategic commitment of the country in the education system as a whole. The goal of the Education Strategy 2018-2025 is to provide full inclusion of all persons with special educational needs in the education system, adapting the curricula to their needs and possibilities, improving the infrastructure of the education system, strengthening the capacities of the teachers and the professional services. In practice, the system has been operating for many years (especially in primary education), but the experience of the faculties has been different.

96 For example, at Mother Teresa University. Statement from a professor in the media study program. At the University “Goce Delchev” in Shtip, university radio and the university television (with equipment and studio) were established in 2007. Statement of a professor at the Faculty of Educational Sciences at UGD - Shtip, interview conducted on 03.12.2021.

97 Statement of a professor at the Faculty of Law, media studies at the University “Goce Delchev” from Shtip, interview conducted on 13.12.2021.

98 Statement of a professor at the Faculty of Law, studies in journalism at UKIM - Skopje, interview conducted on 03.12.2021.

99 Cooperation with the NGO Metamorphosis - Skopje, on several projects. Statement of a professor at the Faculty of Information Sciences and Computer Engineering at UKIM, Skopje, interview conducted on 03.12.2021.

100 Statement of a professor at the Faculty of Pedagogy at the State University of Tetovo, interview conducted on 09.12.2021.

101 It is a project implemented with the Step by Step Foundation, funded by the Save the Children Foundation. Statement of an engaged professor from the Faculty of Pedagogy at UKIM - Skopje, interview conducted on 10.12.2021.

102 “Casper” project funded by a cascading project of the European Union from the Horizon 20/20 program, with implementation of tools from artificial intelligence, machine learning, natural language processing and the like. Statement of a professor participating in the project from the Faculty of Information Sciences and Computer Engineering at UKIM Skopje in an interview conducted on 06.12.2021.

103 Statement of professors at the Faculty of Pedagogy in Bitola, interview conducted on 20.12.2021.

Some professors will say that “the teaching contents are equally available to all and the students with different disabilities successfully master the envisaged goals of the study program”¹⁰⁴ ; that they have at their disposal “technologically advanced system with e-index, e-learning platform, e-library, e-teaching that helps a lot”¹⁰⁵, or “a hybrid teaching model where students can choose from a variety of audio, video, print, and electronic materials.”¹⁰⁶ In addition, “the inclusiveness is a factor that is taken into account when designing the teaching process, so that the content can be adapted to all categories of students.”¹⁰⁷

However, “there is a lack of infrastructure (buildings, equipment, assistive technologies) especially for students with mobility impairments and eye-sight problems.”¹⁰⁸ Special mention should be made of the engagement of professors and students from the Faculty of Information Sciences and Computer Engineering (UKIM) who, together with the Faculty of Philosophy (UKIM), promoted a tool for “text to speech, voice to text” intended for visually impaired persons, so that they study by listening to the written texts . All of the learning materials are also published on the “ring management system”, where the video recordings from lectures, slides and tools for enlarging the screen are made available. In fact, the Faculty has been continuously working (with engagement of several teams) on the processing of natural languages, various news aggregators, translation systems for the blind and the disabled. They are currently working (within the Erasmus Project) on a project for use of robots for communication with children with autism - but what is devastating is the fact that the people with disabilities are physically unable to access the Faculty premises – there is no access ramp in the building or a lift.¹⁰⁹

Professors’ general view is that media literacy has been a global “issue” for decades and one that requires a serious approach, even though our country seems to remain unaware of its importance, the phenomena of the 21st century and how to deal with an invasion of information from the media. In addition, today, media literacy is subject to a terminological transformation and digital literacy is frequently mentioned as a lifelong competence. In terms of the perspectives of media literacy in the education system in N. Macedonia, professors from the University of Bitola perhaps give the most comprehensive view: **“Being literate in media and informatics today is like being literate in languages or arithmetic, it is an essential competence of any young person. However, a greater problem in our country is the situation with the shortage of material and technical equipment in many educational institutions (especially in primary schools), making this process more complex, even impossible in certain environments. The attention in Macedonia should be paid to the modernization of the working conditions (didactic materials, equipment, high-speed internet, computer rooms, laboratories, etc.) as well as to ensuring equal access to all students to the materials and the technical equipment, as key requirement stipulated in the Millennium Development Goals of Education.”**¹¹⁰ Media and information literacy as an integral part of any human being **“must be a success story in our country as well”**¹¹¹.

104 Statement of a professor at the Faculty of Pedagogy at the University “St. Kliment Ohridski” Bitola, as well as the statement of a professor at the Faculty of Pedagogy at UKIM, Skopje, interview conducted on 10.12. and 20.12.2021.

105 Statement of a professor at the Faculty of Law, studies in journalism at UKIM - Skopje, interview conducted on 03.12.2021.

106 Statement of a professor at the International Balkan University - Skopje, interview conducted on 10.12.2021.

107 Statement of a professor at the Faculty of Political Science at the University American College Skopje, interview conducted on 10.12.2021.

108 Statement of a professor at the Faculty of Law, studies in journalism at UKIM - Skopje as well as the statement of a professor at the Faculty of Information Sciences and Computer Engineering at UKIM - Skopje, interview conducted on 03.12.2021.

109 For that purpose, they actively cooperate with the Johann Kepler University from Linz, Austria, with the NGO “Open the Windows” from Skopje and with the Vienna Technical Faculty. Statement of professors at the Faculty of Information Sciences and Computer Engineering at UKIM - Skopje, interview conducted on 06.12.2021.

110 Statement of professors at the Faculty of Pedagogy from Bitola, interview conducted on 20.12.2021.

111 Statement of a professor at the Faculty of Educational Sciences at the University “Goce Delchev” - Shtip, interview conducted on 03.12.2021.

4.6. Research activity

As far as the research work related to media literacy is concerned, the teaching staff is involved in these activities in different ways, but most often individually and insufficiently. It is usually about cooperation in projects implemented by non-governmental organizations (through memoranda of cooperation) and engagement as experts-professors in the field. The experiences are different, from participating in projects by preparing educational material for fight against fake information, misinformation and cyber security (for primary education), projects for multicultural and inter-ethnic integration with campaigns and trainings, projects for prevention of cyberbullying, peer violence by training teachers and pedagogues, psychologists, students from various schools and parents, projects for protection of children from online bullying and other forms of cyberbullying¹⁰², to projects related to revision of existing study programs and introduction of subjects in the field of media literacy¹⁰³. Efforts are also being made to engage students, if not otherwise, at least through training.

4.7. Making student media literate

Media literacy is not taught at the faculties and universities in the country, although certain aspects of it can be found in other related subjects. Yet, the subject is not unknown to the Macedonian students and they do have a some (although incomplete) knowledge about it from other subjects they had in high school, mainly Sociology; as far as university subjects are concerned, they have knowledge about the structure of the media, access to their content, the transmission of information, the influence of the media, they can distinguish between true and false news, and can also conduct an analysis, selection, and reproduction of the media content. The absence of media literacy from the teaching process is compensated by subjects such as Mass Media, Media and Society, Popular Culture, Propaganda and Persuasion, Media Writing, Ethics in Communication.¹¹² The Media Culture subject stands out. All faculties of pedagogy teach this subject with several methodological units on media literacy. Students learn how to analyze information by structure, author, sources, how to “identify” inaccurate news and data. In case they had a hard time recognizing the difference between professional and fake news in high school, they do not have such a problem now; unfortunately, due to the fact that such news literally spreads with the speed of light and attracts attention with breaking headlines, the risk remains. Students use special textbooks and books that define media literacy.¹¹³ Hence their clear understanding of what media literacy is and how it is defined: “... **a particular ability of a person to be able to access, analyze, evaluate, have his/ her own critical review of media content in various forms, and finally to act or use that content in the future**”.¹¹⁴

112 Statement of students from the focus group of the Faculty of Communications at the International Balkan University, as well as attitude of students from the focus group of the Faculty of Languages, Cultures and Communications at the South East European University.

113 The students from the focus group at the Faculty of Educational Sciences at the University “Goce Delchev” from Shtip especially point out the Handbook on Media Literacy for Youth, Media and CSOs prepared by the School of Journalism and Public Relations (later merged with the Institute for Communication Studies) as well as “Teaching and Learning in the 21st Century” - a Handbook for primary school teachers, funded by USAID prepared within the Primary Education Project conducted by the Academy for Development of Education, Skopje 2009.

114 Statement of a student from the focus group from the Faculty of Educational Sciences, University “Goce Delchev”, Shtip.

Or, as **“knowledge about the media role, influence, power in a society, knowledge about handling the information that is circulated in the media daily, analysis and evaluation of media texts using acquired critical thinking skills.”**¹¹⁵. In this way, media literacy helps them to recognize the true values in the disseminated information. Students also say that “...being media literate does not imply only ability to read and write, but also, to be knowledgeable how to address the information you read in a critical manner ... to have the aptitude to select the information and analyze it so that you could eventually identify the objective reality... this is why it is very important not to read the news routinely and not to take them for granted; it is crucial that we refer to more sources and more media”¹¹⁶, although the possibility of misinformation and speculations remains, particularly about relatively novel and unknown topics (such as the COVID vaccines), about which there is no sufficient knowledge.

Macedonian students agree that we live in a digitalized everyday life in which the information and news we receive is not always confirmed. Anyone with access to the internet can write a story, be it on social media or a blog, can create a page and share it on the media often visited by young people. Do we not need education for that? Moreover, that influx of information can often be puzzling, for both the young people and the rest. The COVID-19 pandemic and the plethora of various articles and information about the virus are often cited as good examples of which many have been proven to be untrue. Undoubtedly, the corona crisis opened a large space for spreading fake news, with social media, internet portals and mass media being the main channels. That is why media literacy is indispensable as:

“... the starting point for the way we use the media and the way we interpret and perceive the meaning of the messages in the information which is published and disseminated to us. If media literacy among the youth increases, we will be better prepared to assess and analyze what we receive as information in order to prevent manipulation. The entire media literacy as a concept is not the end product but a process that we all have to go through.”¹¹⁷

Perhaps, the key challenge here is to how to create critical thinking, not only through media literacy but also throughout the whole education process. When asked to what extent their faculties develop their critical attitude towards society, the students had different opinions. Some believe that now they have more skills to be critically objective and that the media-oriented subjects (such as mass media, media and society, journalistic ethics, fake news topics, disinformation) help them a great deal.¹¹⁸

Others add that now, when they are overwhelmed with an abundance of information, they develop a natural ability for critical thinking about the information and are aware of the manipulations, the fake news or the hate speech. This is also a result of the fact that they work on projects at the faculty, make research, sort out, select information and data, helping them to have a critical viewpoint and to know what to expect from their analysis.¹¹⁹ For others, on the other hand, the education system failed to prepare them to think critically at the start of their education (primary school); they were learning just for the sake of getting a higher grade, without anyone actually thinking of what the learning was about. Now, the subjects they study at the faculties help the development of their critical thinking.

115 Statement of a student from a focus group of students from the Faculty of Pedagogy at the University “St. Kliment Ohridski ”from Bitola.

116 Statement of a student from a focus group on journalism studies at the Faculty of Law in Skopje at UKIM.

117 Statement of a student from the focus group of political studies at the Faculty of Law in Skopje at UKIM.

118 Statement of students from the focus group of the International Balkan University and statement of students from the focus group of the Faculty of Languages, Cultures and Communications of the South East European University.

119 Statement of students from the focus group at the Faculty of Pedagogy in Bitola

In other words, after everything they have read and after all the information they have received over the years, it is normal for them to become skeptical and develop critical thinking.¹²⁰ They recall, however, that in secondary education certain schools had debate clubs which helped the students to develop critical thinking, with a significant number of classmates volunteering in the many debate clubs in citizen's associations (which still continues today), such as the Youth Education Forum (YEF)¹²¹ where they try to build their own critical thinking and critical attitude by themselves. Generally speaking, all of them are right; one opinion stands out:

“Critical thinking can and does develop over a lifetime, but it is better to start at an early age, during primary and secondary education, with the inclusion of pedagogists and psychologists who would work with children; and then off we go to college. Later, when we start looking for a job and when we find ourselves in another environment, with colleagues, supervisors, we must have a critical attitude towards the company and the competition so as to make a realistic analysis about the job.”¹²²

On the other hand, students rarely participate in seminars, trainings, lectures, conferences or workshops related to trending issues and problems (in both media and other spheres). Most of them have not had such an opportunity at all, while the few who have attended such events are very satisfied with the things they learned, the teamwork and the practical knowledge and experience. They say that opportunities, especially for students in journalism, do exist, but they are not underused.

When it comes to using information and communication technologies in the educational process, the faculties, more or less, provided adequate technical conditions. The technical faculties are the best in this regard. For example, the Faculty of Information Sciences and Computer Engineering has a real (computing) capacity to meet the needs of all students, as well as for the lectures and for laboratory exercises. Faculties of social sciences do not lag behind either, especially the International Balkan University, where the new so-called hybrid model of teaching is used and where the students can attend classes either by being in the classroom or online from their homes. At the University of Shtip, the lectures, the teaching and the exams have been held online without any difficulties, particularly during the COVID crisis. (by using Microsoft Teams platform).

The students at this University say that:

“We are the children of the advanced 21st century. We can find information much faster online than we can read books. Besides, the information in the books is already outdated, and every day there is more and more new information.”¹²³

120 Statement of students in journalism, public relations and information sciences and computer engineering from the focus group at UKIM

121 Information on the work and activities of YEF. See: <https://mof.mk/za-nas/> The Youth Educational Forum is also a member of the AVMS Media Literacy Network, <https://mediumskapismenost.mk/>

122 Statement of a student of information sciences and computer engineering from the focus group at UKIM.

123 Statement of a student from the focus group from the University “Goce Delchev” from Shtip.

The situation is similar at other faculties as well. They provide technical support for the teaching process, for the presentations of student project assignments, the university textbooks are available online (for instance, the South- East European University); the teaching is conducted online in specially equipped (computer) rooms, with video projectors for the presentation of lectures or students' seminar papers (for instance, the Faculty of Pedagogy in Bitola). Faculties with more modest equipment have a computer lab where all subjects related to informatics are taught, but it is scarce for the total number of students (such is the Faculty of Pedagogy in Skopje), a computer room which is free for students to use (for example, the Institute of Pedagogy in Skopje), a computer room which students do not use (for example, the Faculty of Law in Skopje) or a library with computers and internet used only by professors (for example, the State University of Tetovo).

All students are familiar with the new technologies and they use them successfully. However, they lack knowledge about how to protect themselves from the abuse of information they share with each other, or, from viruses-fake information and computer viruses. They are not aware of the potential risks of the Internet use and how compromised their security may be in the virtual world. That is why they emphasize the need for media and information literacy. This can be blended into one subject "media-information literacy" or, can be two separate subjects; it should be made available for all, and not just the academic community. It may be introduced as a compulsory subject in primary school (eighth and ninth grade), continue in secondary school; or, through special trainings organized by non-governmental organizations. They will point out that:

"Today everything has become digital, whether it is a phone or a laptop - all transactions are carried out over the phone, the currencies are digitized. Digitalization has become an integral part of every person's life and everyone should be equally educated in media and information."¹²⁴

In the end, whether we call the young people of today who grew up in a digital, multimedia environment "digital natives"¹²⁵, Generation Z or Millennials, makes no difference at all. They undoubtedly live in an e-world that has become their mother tongue. They are fluent in the language of computers, video games, mobile phones... Many tools of the digital age, such as games, the Internet, e-mail, messenger, blogs are an integral part of their life. They say so. Almost all students involved in the research focus groups from various faculties and study programs agree that they are very dependent on the new media, with their phones and social media ranking first on their list:

"I am on the phone literally all day. If I give up these devices, I have to give up my whole social life... My computer is on all the time, I do not turn it off for weeks... The phone is always with me, I can see notifications, calls, messages, emails... I cannot give up my phone, too many aspects of my life are tied to it - from a simple 'going out' chat to exam information, exam results, or events advertised on social media."¹²⁶

124 Statement of students from the focus group at the University "Ss. Cyril and Methodius" Skopje

125 Marc Prensky was the first to introduce the concept of digital natives and digital immigrants in 2001, which the science does not always accept. Source:

<https://www.marcprensky.com/writing/Prensky%20-%20Digital%20Natives,%20Digital%20Immigrants%20-%20Part1.pdf>

126 Statements of students from the focus group at the University "Ss. Cyril and Methodius" Skopje

They use their phones or scroll on Facebook or Instagram the whole day (or at least 7-8 hours a day). If they watch a TV sitcom, they spend twenty-four hours a day (binge watching). They do not even know how much time they actually spend on the phone.¹²⁷ However, there are also those who think that spending so much time on the phone is a waste of time and they are brainwashed with all kinds of information.¹²⁸ Many of them could temporarily give up their electronic devices, but not on their own initiative (but when attending at seminar or workshop, for instance). Then they are oblivious of the fact that they are out of town, away from home, they rest their body and they feel very nice.

We agree that information and communication technologies are powerful tools for entertainment and learning, however, they should be used responsibly. Once we admit that, we will have sufficient arguments to include media literacy, or media-IT literacy in the education process, so that young people can actively and critically confront the information they can access and are exposed to.



127 Statements by students from the focus group at the International Balkan University and the focus group at the State University of Tetovo.

128 Statement of a student from the focus group at the Faculty of Pedagogy in Skopje

“We must prepare the young for a life in a world of powerful images, words and sounds.”

UNESCO, 1982

In the last decade, Europe and the world have increased their attention and commitment to media literacy and its inclusion in the education process. Numerous documents, resolutions, declarations of international organizations (UNESCO), and European Union institutions attest to this. The scientific and theoretical knowledge points to the need to promote media literacy in education and training in order to strengthen the critical thinking of students, to advance active citizenship and the common EU values. Thereby, it is considered to be one of the most important literacies of the 21st century.

The Republic of North Macedonia lags far behind the European countries when it comes to the implementation of media literacy in the education system, so it is very difficult to recognize the importance of media education for the democratization of society. It is true that the baby steps of including media literacy in the education system were made ten years ago, predominantly in primary education, but it is only now that we can talk about truly serious steps in that regard. Media literacy has been introduced and has been already functioning in primary education, but not as a new, individual subject in the curriculum, but rather as a “way of learning in all of the subjects”. This process will continue in secondary education. As for higher education institutions, which used to include media literacy within other, related disciplines on a sporadic basis, will be teaching media literacy as a separate mandatory subject in many study programs as of the academic year 2021/2022. The Universities will offer it as an elective subject. The intention is to give media literacy its place in social sciences and humanities, particularly in the faculties of pedagogy which train future educators who will work in the education process and will teach the youngest students.

Macedonian students clearly understand the concept of media literacy and critical thinking as a roadmap for active thinking citizenship. In their view, this is a process that everyone needs to experience without exception. The professors explain that functional literacy is essential for the time we live in. It must start in primary education and continue in secondary and higher education; these are the arguments that clearly speak in favor of its active inclusion in the overall education process. One of the main challenges for media literacy is digitalization, in other words, to which extent the young and the adult are information literate. Students today, may rightly call themselves “digital natives” and the professors (especially the senior ones) call themselves “digital immigrants”. Information and communication technologies are powerful tools for entertainment and learning, but they should be used responsibly. Hence, the formula of “media-information literacy” in the education process may seem like the most acceptable concept and a prerequisite for an open, plural, inclusive and participatory society of knowledge.

In other words, this is achieved by using an interdisciplinary and interactive approach (according to the UNESCO MIP program), by learning and understanding media and information in the context of the democratic discourse and social participation, by understanding media content and the use of it, through critical evaluation of information and sources of information, by understanding the new and traditional media forms, through the promotion of media literacy and information literacy skills and the concept of civic education as responsible participants in the social life.

If we agree that higher university education is not a system in itself, but a part of the education system as a whole, then the development of media literacy must become an integral part of it. In the context of lifelong learning, media literacy should be developed from an early age until the university years, but also even after the education cycle has formally been completed. This concept, or the “philosophy” of education, has nowadays been successfully applied around the world. This story should and could succeed in the Republic of North Macedonia as well.



The implementation of media literacy in the education system in the Republic of North Macedonia remains a great challenge. The need for full incorporation of media literacy in all levels of formal and non-formal education is clearly identified and recognized by the academic community, professors and students. According to the research findings, the following recommendations are provided.

- Further harmonization of the legislation and the strategies in the national education policy for the development of media literacy with the European directives and standards in education in this field.
- Improved cooperation among all relevant stakeholders in the society for the purpose of a greater promotion of media literacy; a dialogue between relevant education institutions, the civil sector and the media via conferences and other public events aimed at developing media literacy. Certain steps for fostering this cooperation can include formal designation of responsible officials, coordinators, working groups, and such, who could take on more direct accountability and could ensure better transparency of these activities.
- Strengthening of the existing networks and associations of institutions and organizations for media literacy, as well as developing new ones that are adapted to particular areas and issues.
- Improved implementation of the media literacy concept in the education process, by following the success stories and experiences from primary and secondary education into higher education.
- Enhanced integration of the core concepts of media literacy in the manner that will ensure its harmonized, concise and effective implementation in education, as well as its consistent implementation in different subjects and on different levels of education.
- Continuous training, development and education programs the teaching staff regarding media literacy and the key trending contents and topics in this field. Modernization of the literature used in teaching on media literacy-related topics, as well as encouraging authorships and translations in this area.
- Technical-technological equipment and modernization of higher education institutions, especially the faculties of pedagogy, with tools and multimedia materials for teaching media literacy.
- Creation of a database of educational resources and materials, with open access for the teaching staff.
- Revision of the study programs for communications, media, informatics, and the faculties of pedagogy and introduction of modern curricula for media education.
- -Capacity and quality building of the educators who will be teaching this program.
- Investing in further systematic research of various aspects, dimensions and good practices in teaching media literacy.
- A more active and proactive engagement of the expert public in creating a unified terminology (glossary) in the field of media, digital and information literacy, and dealing with disinformation.

ANNEX 1

Interview questions with the rectors, vice-rectors, deans, professors about the presence of media literacy in the study programs of the higher education institutions in the Republic of North Macedonia

- 1. What is your view on the media literacy concept in the education system?**- it has been present in documents, resolutions, recommendations of the European Union, UN-ESCO... ever since and it encompasses preschool, primary, secondary, higher, lifelong education.
- 2. Is media literacy required in higher education and why?** Whether as an essential need and for the purpose of harmonization with European and global standards in this field or as a requirement that is part of the European Union accession process?
- 3. How would you define it today - as media literacy or as media and information literacy? Does the Government have explicit policy on media education (for example, a strategic document)?** Where do you see the place of media literacy in education process that is using digital and online tools and platforms?
- 4. Whether, how and to what extent the education system reforms in Macedonia include the concept of media literacy? Does it occur systematically or sporadically and occasionally?** The education system in Macedonia (since independence) has undergone several “serious” reforms - especially the introduction of the ninth grade, the credit transfer system in higher education, which presupposed changes in study programs and the specific subjects.
- 5. What is the current situation at the faculty at which you teach? - is media literacy “implemented” in the study program in any way? Does your educational institution offer content and teaching units in the field of media literacy?** Is there a special subject (mandatory or optional) on media literacy which is incorporated in existing subjects (through special methodological units), or other activities (which ones)?
- 6. Do students make critical analyzes of media content in the teaching activities?**
- 7. Are these curricula also available to students with disabilities?** Are they available for different groups of students according to gender, ethnicity, etc.? Is the offer sufficient in order to ensure equal and fair access for all students or something more can be done? What else?
- 8. Does the faculty have special teaching content with which the students are trained to deal with disinformation?** Are the effects of disinformation campaigns being analyzed?
- 9. Was the faculty involved in external project activities for media literacy?** Alone or in partnership with the civil society sector, the media in the country, other faculties in the country and abroad? How common is the practice for this type of networking?

- 10. How do you evaluate the research activity in the field of media literacy within your institution?** Are regular surveys done? How many students are involved in these research activities or are these activities mostly done by the teaching staff?
- 11. Have you been part of educational-scientific activities related to media literacy? (trainings, seminars, conferences, debates, etc.).**
- 12. Where, at which faculties (and we have many of those) should media literacy be an integral part of teaching?** Within which faculties, study programs, subjects?
- 13. How to specifically implement the introduction of media literacy in higher education?** At the initiative of the faculty itself (which is then followed by accreditation procedure), through the University where that faculty is (the Rector's Office also has a Vice-Rector for Teaching), or wait action from the Ministry of Education and Science.
- 14. In your opinion, what is the best format or method for including media literacy in formal education?**
- 15. Has the need to incorporate media literacy in teaching been "discussed" within the home faculty so far?** For example, at the teaching-scientific council or in another form. Do you have any evaluation from the students who request a revision of the study programs in this direction? Other research?
- 16. Where do you see the perspective of media literacy in higher education in Macedonia?** Which specific areas of media literacy are particularly important for our country?

ANNEX 2

Questions for the focus groups of students about the presence of media literacy in the study programs at public, private and private universities in the Republic of North Macedonia

- 1. How familiar are you with the concept of media literacy and what does it mean for you?** (How do you define it, what does it mean) have you heard of media literacy and how much do you know about it?
- 2. How much and how does the faculty prepare you to form a critical attitude towards the society?**
- 3. Are there any courses at your faculty in which you can recognize elements of media literacy? Have you had lectures, tutorials or media-related trainings?** What is their role, their function, how they “live”, what are the effects on public opinion? New media trends, such as “youtubers”, “influencers”, algorithms, etc.? What are those subjects, methodological units?
- 4. Does the faculty have special teaching content that enables you to deal with disinformation?** Do you analyze the effects of disinformation campaigns?
- 5. Are there technical preconditions at your faculty for attending classes with adequate use of information and communication technologies?** What are those technical preconditions, how and how much are they used? If not, why not?
- 6. Are these curricula also available to students with disabilities?** Are they available for different groups of students according to gender, ethnicity, etc.? Is the offer sufficient in order to ensure equal and fair access for all students or something more can be done? What else?
- 7. How well trained are you in using new technologies** (above all, the internet) and aware of the problems of one’s own security, privacy in the online environment, own responsibility both regarding content that is posted and to other users?
- 8. Do you need (and why) a separate subject on media literacy (compulsory or optional) or incorporation of media literacy with separate methodological units in the existing subjects (which ones?) At your faculty?** What is the attitude among students for studying media literacy?
- 9. Are you involved in research in the field of media literacy?** Does your faculty provide sufficient opportunities to encourage students in academic and applied research (publication of academic papers, etc.)?
- 10. Have you participated in any media lectures or trainings outside of your educational institution?**

Habits and skills

- **11.** How much time do you actively spend with the media per day?
- **12.** Could you (temporarily) give up from using media (phones, computers and other devices to use the internet as well as social media)?
- **13.** Do you consider yourself skilled enough to recognize disinformation, media manipulation of the online or traditional media? What do you do? How can these skills and knowledge be improved in students?
- **14.** What are the pros and cons of using the media and the internet?

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