

Media Education in the Czech Republic

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Abstract

The twenty-first century is associated with ever-accelerating technological progress. In particular, the development of the Internet and things related to it (such as social networks) brings with it increasing demands on the critical assessment of texts and media messages by their recipient. Orientation in the media, whether classic or so-called new media, and their use for purposes that bring benefits and not harm to the individual, is the basis of media literacy. The school and education play a significant role in the whole process, thanks to which the pupils should learn at least the basics of media literacy. Media education is currently a topic under discussion and each country approaches its implementation in a somewhat different way. In the research study, we deal with the current state of media education in the Czech Republic in terms of curriculum, its position in Czech society, educational materials or organizations associated with media education. We also focus on research carried out so far, which indicates the weaknesses in the implementation of media education. The study showed that media education is firmly entrenched in the Czech system of curricular documents in the form of a cross-cutting theme, but there is a discrepancy between the state which, according to these documents, should be, and the real state. There are several factors, such as insufficient teacher training, the fragmentation of educational materials and methodologies, as well as the unclear definition of a strategic concept for media literacy education.

Keywords: Media literacy; teachers; disinformation

1. Introduction

Dynamic changes related to the development of the Internet and the media bring with them ever-increasing competencies of orientation in the information from the media that surround us every day. We call this ability, which is based on the knowledge needed to gain a critical distance from the media (Mičienka & Jiráček, 2007), media literacy. By increasing media literacy, the development of which should be one of the goals of media education, a pupil or an adult can make better use of the media (including the Internet) in the process of forming their own worldview and values based on truthful information. In recent years, however, we have witnessed the spread of new phenomena in the media world; These are, for example, social networks and social media, a change in advertising strategy, disinformation or media information that attack basic human instincts that support stereotyping. It is thanks to these phenomena and the awareness of their dangers, which in extreme cases can affect a huge mass of people and thus threaten democracy anywhere in the world, the need to increase media literacy has become one of the much-discussed topics. As mentioned by the European

Commission on their website (2021): “Media literacy has never been as important as it is today. It enables citizens of all ages to navigate the modern news environment and take informed decisions.” We believe that cooperation between states and the sharing of experience not only across the European Union but also around the world can help to increase the media literacy of the entire human population, which can strengthen the fight against unfair practices that are not in accordance with democratic principles. For this reason, we decided to write a research study that summarizes the current state of media education in the Czech Republic.

2. Media Education in the Czech Republic

2.1. Embedded Media Education in the Curriculum

There are basic curricular documents in the Czech education system which are the Framework Educational Programmes, which form a generally binding framework for the creation of school educational programmes. The first Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education was approved on the basis of an extensive curricular reform in 2005 and, among other things, already included the cross-cutting theme of media education. It should be noted that the latest version of the Framework Educational Programme from 2021 is in the topic of media education almost indistinguishable from the version from 2005. In 16 years, only a few lines of text have been added to the description of the cross-cutting theme, which relate to media communication and the possible risks associated with it, and the need for constant critical evaluation of information is also mentioned. However, the mandatory thematic areas have not been changed. (National Institute for Education, 2007, 2021)

Media education is currently one of the six cross-cutting themes in the Framework Educational Programmes for Basic Education and for Grammar Schools, while in the Framework Educational Programme for Secondary Vocational Schools this cross-cutting theme is missing, but partial topics of media education are mentioned in computer science, for example. In addition to media education, cross-cutting themes in primary schools and grammar schools include personal and social education, education of democratic citizenship, education for thinking in European and global contexts, multicultural education, and environmental education. Cross-cutting themes present current issues in today's world and serve as an important formative element of basic education. Cross-cutting themes also create opportunities for individual application of pupils and for their mutual cooperation and help to develop the pupil's personality, especially in the area of attitudes and values. Cross-cutting themes are a compulsory part of primary and secondary education, schools must offer the pupils all thematic areas from individual cross-cutting themes, but it is up to individual schools to decide in which years and how the cross-cutting themes are implemented. Schools can thus implement media education by including it in various subjects (for example, the Czech language, civics, or computer science) or by means of trainings, seminars, projects and discussions. The school may also decide to implement the given cross-cutting theme using a separate subject. (Methodical portal RVP.CZ, n. D.)

According to the Framework Educational Programme, media education offers “*elementary knowledge and skills related to media communication and work with the media*” (National Institute for Education, 2021). The aim of this cross-cutting theme is to equip pupils with a basic level of media literacy. Media literacy consists of two components: knowledge and skills. In terms of knowledge, students should acquire basic knowledge about the functioning and social role of media in society, knowledge then serves to support “*informed, active and independent involvement of the individual in media communication*” (National Institute for Education, 2021). The thematic areas that schools must include in primary school education are critical reading and perception of media messages, interpretation of the relationship between media messages and reality, construction of media messages, perception of the author of media messages and the functioning and influence of the media in society.

2.2. Discussion in public space

In recent years, media education has been a much-discussed topic not only among experts, but also in public space. In interviews for the media, the Minister of Education, Robert Plaga, mentioned several times the need to include critical thinking associated with evaluating the relevance of information and verifying the source, which is one of the competencies of media literacy (Brzybohatá & Hrdinová, 2019). Despite these statements, however, teachers and experts from the Platform for Media Education did not see much change in the concept of media education in Czech education, and therefore they wrote an open letter to the Minister of Education. In this letter, the authors emphasized that too little space is devoted to media education in schools, teachers are not sufficiently prepared for teaching media education and they feel the lack of materials or methodological support, and there is no time left in school for this cross-cutting theme. The authors saw the correction of this situation in the implementation of four basic steps: determination of the importance of media education, transparency of the FEP revision process and consideration of media literacy, integration of media education into the education of students of Faculties of Education and financial support for projects and activities of various entities in this field. The Minister of Education responded to this open letter with the argument that a revision of the curriculum was being prepared, which would also consider the need for media education (Hlavinka 2020).

However, there are also voices in the discussions that perceive media education negatively, even from political leaders, for example that the activities of the non-profit organization People in Need, which deals with media education in schools, are “*liberal neo-fascism, which brainwashes children in primary and secondary schools*” (Erhart & Kropáčková, 2018).

2.3. Organizations dealing with media education in the primary school environment

When schools choose to implement media education in the form of discussions, workshops or various trainings, they can use several organizations that deal with this topic. The most significant in this regard is a non-profit organization People in Need, which

organizes Media Education Weeks within the One World in Schools project, during which discussions, workshops and lectures are held in primary and secondary schools. One World in Schools also organizes a teacher training and is the author of a number of methodologies and free publications dealing with media education. On their website, there are also listed several audio-visual lessons that can be used in media education classes (One World in Schools, n. d.).

The “E-Bezpečí” (E-Safety) project implemented by the Centre for the Prevention of Risky Virtual Communication at the Faculty of Education, Palacký University in Olomouc focuses on the prevention of risky behaviour on the Internet and the strengthening of media literacy. The project focuses on field work with various age groups, i.e. lectures, discussions and preventive educational events. There are also projects focusing on the training of pupils or teachers, which arose from the initiative of young students, which are for example “Zvol si info”, “Fakescape” or “Faketicky”. Seminars for teachers are also organized by the public broadcaster Czech Television. Commercial entities are also active in media education, for example the most visited Czech search engine Seznam.cz as part of its project “Seznam se s médií” (Meet the Media) provides online courses for primary and secondary school teachers. Another such entity is O2, one of the leading telecommunications operators in the Czech Republic. They founded the O2 Smart School portal, which focuses, for example, on Internet safety and media literacy, and which contains a number of materials that can be used for teaching media education.

2.4. Textbooks and other educational materials

In the present, there is only one textbook of media education on offer for basic education, from the Fraus publishing house (Bělohavá, 2021). This textbook is approved by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (it has a so-called MEYS Clause), which in practice means that the textbook is in accordance with the framework educational programmes and the school can use subsidies from the Ministry of Education. The second textbook with a clause from the Ministry is only for secondary schools, the textbook “Občanský a společenskovední základ – Sociologie Média” (Civic and Social Sciences - Sociology of Media) (Köhlerová, 2013) from Computer Media.

In addition to these textbooks, teachers can use methodologies and educational materials freely available on the Internet. In this regard, the One World in Schools project has produced the most publications. They published their first publication, a methodology “Být v obraze” (Be in the Picture) in 2007, and since then, ten more publications or methodologies have been added. In addition to methodologies that deal with journalistic activity or an analysis of media messages, for example the publication “Podoby ruské propagandy či Dezinformační dezinfekce” (Forms of Russian Propaganda and Disinformation Disinfection) was published, which deals with a critical assessment of disinformation during the covid-19 epidemic. Precisely because the project One World in Schools focuses in its publications on current topics with specific examples such as Russian propaganda, the LGBT community or the phenomenon of disinformation, they are often criticized by some politicians.

An open textbook by Michal Kaderka, a teacher at the Na Zatlance grammar school in Prague, has become very popular. The open textbook, which was created from Kaderka's personal materials for the media education course, is available online and contains methodology and teaching materials for basic topics of media education, such as history of media, creation of media messages, but also “hate speech” or fallacies (Kaderka, 2019).

Further educational materials and methodologies can be downloaded by teachers from the above-mentioned projects (“Faketicky”, “E-bezpečí”, „O2 chytrá škola” and “Seznam se s médií”). There is a large amount of teaching materials, but they are fragmented into several sources and the teachers must plan their own schedule for teaching media education.

3. Research into media education and literacy

In 2017, the Czech School Inspectorate carried out a survey focused on the conditions and course of implementation of topics related to media education. This survey found that *“pupils in the 9th year of primary school and pupils in the 2nd year of secondary school achieved a relatively low success rate in the sample survey of the achieved level of media literacy”* (Czech School Inspectorate, 2018, p. 38). The assessment of media literacy was based on two components - cognitive and critical. While the cognitive component focused on the aspect of acquiring knowledge about the functioning and social role of the media (e.g. knowledge of media types, their legal framework, principles of functioning, etc.), critical thinking was related to the critical component, *“strongly related to the pupil's ability to critically and creatively deal with the media and their production (e.g. interpretation of media messages, recognition and assessment of information in a media message)”* (Czech School Inspectorate, 2018, p. 5). According to the Czech School Inspectorate, the problems of pupils in both classes are manifested in the critical component of media literacy, especially in orientation in a longer text with the need to decide on the truthfulness/trustworthiness of the message or the attitude of the speaker, even though to the critical component of media literacy (e.g. orientation skills in the media and a critical approach to them, media threats) principals and teachers of schools attach the greatest importance in the field of media education. The results of the survey thus come as a surprise with the findings that *“at more than 70% of schools where thematic inspection activities took place (107 primary and secondary schools), at least half of the internal teachers were involved in the implementation of media education to varying degrees. In almost 90% of these schools, media education was implemented in the form of a cross-cutting theme in various subjects.”* (Czech School Inspectorate, 2018)

The research of the One World in Schools project focused on the media literacy of secondary school students. The first part of the research contained 15 tasks testing the level of media literacy and analysis of several specific media messages. The second part mapped the attitudes and answered, for example, questions about what media students consider to be trustworthy or what is the role of media in democracy. The researchers found out that students have very little knowledge of the content displayed on the Internet, have difficulty critically assessing media messages or are unsure which media are public, for example, 57%

of students did not know or were unsure about that the website “Parlamentní listy”, whose name has nothing to do with the Parliament of the Czech Republic, is not a public media. (One World in Schools, 2018)

The STEM / MARK agency together with Czech Television (2018) carried out an media literacy survey of an adult population in the Czech Republic. The survey pointed to the low level of media literacy, the respondents received an average of 39 points out of 100. An important factor was education, when *“people with lower and higher education had the highest score gap”* - university graduates achieved an average of 48 points, the respondents without The Maturita (secondary school diploma) 34 points. The respondents achieved a high level (average 67 points) in technical knowledge. However, they achieved significantly worse results in their ability to interpret media messages, i.e. whether they know the term fake news, whether they can recognize fake news and how. The result showed that fake news can only be recognized by a quarter of the population. (STEM / MARK, 2018)

The most recent research survey (Kopecký et al., 2021), which was attended by 2,155 teachers, found out, among other things, what teachers think about the teaching of media education or which topics they teach in media education. The survey showed that 91.6% of teachers agreed with the statement that media education is important. However, only 21.6% of teachers agreed with the statement that the number of hours of media education should be increased at the expense of other subjects. As a cross-cutting theme, 47.01% of teachers teach media education in various subjects, and 3.02% teach it as a separate subject. Regarding the preparation of teachers for media education, only 18% of teachers completed a subject focused on media education as part of their teacher training at the university. A larger number of teachers then attended a form of training in media education, namely 36.89%.

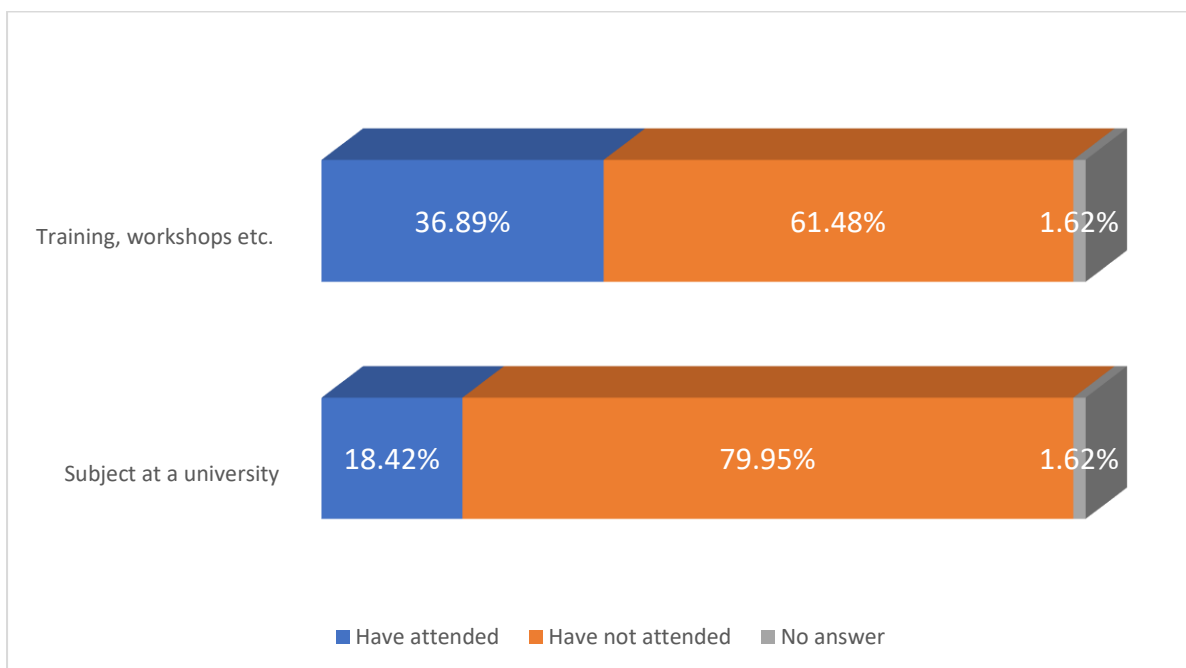


Figure 1. Teacher training for media education

N=2155

Source: Kopecký et al. (2021)

Computer science is one of the most important subjects in which media education is implemented, in 59.95% of cases. Other important subjects of the cross-cutting theme of media education are civics (54.11%) and the Czech language (44.41%).

Also interesting were the topics that teachers were dealing with the most in Czech schools within the framework of media education. Czech teachers were dealing most with the use of the Internet in information retrieval (59.26% of teachers), computer security (51.23%) and the use of communication tools (50.21%). On the contrary, the least at school was mainly about media products.

Table 1. Themes from media education in Czech schools

Themes	It is taught at my school	I would like it to be taught
Internet use - information retrieval	59,26%	18,75%
Computer security (passwords, personal data, fraud, cybercrime)	51,23%	26,26%
Internet use - communication tools (chat, Skype, email...)	50,21%	12,99%
Activities aimed at supporting media literacy at school (worksheets, etc.)	37,91%	25,75%
Internet use - social networks	35,78%	13,83%
Creation of media content at school (school magazine, web, blog...)	32,58%	28,40%
Disinformation, hoaxes and fake news (examples, demonstrations, recognition)	30,58%	35,50%
Recognition of relevant sources of information	28,45%	34,06%
Orientation in the world of media, public, commercial and state media...	23,16%	32,20%
Media products and work with them (advertising, reality show...)	22,23%	22,00%

Source: Kopecký et al. (2021)

N=2155

4. Conclusion

Media education is an integral part of education in the framework educational programmes based on a cross-cutting theme. We have been able to observe this curricular anchoring of media education since 2005. Although during that time, society has undergone major changes related to the development of the Internet and related phenomena such as social networks, the phenomenon of disinformation, streaming services or video games, the curriculum has undergone only minor changes in this direction. Another problem is the fragmentation of educational materials, where teachers must search the Internet for materials from various sources, for example also from commercial entities. In this regard, the crucial role is played by a non-profit organization People in Need with their project One World in Schools, which has become the major producer of educational materials and methodologies. The discrepancies between the theoretical anchoring of media education and the real situation are then confirmed by research, which repeatedly draws attention to the low media literacy of

both pupils and Czech society as a whole. The latest research (Kopecký et al., 2021) points out that insufficient teacher training could be a possible problem.

The preparation of new curricular documents, in which a larger implementation of media education is planned could be a possible improvement of the current situation. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports still supports media education through project funding, for example, the project “Rozumět médiím” (Understanding the Media) with an open textbook by Michal Kaderka, but there is no strategic document that would set a clear direction for how media education should develop. For example, the document *Media Literacy in Finland - National Media Education Policy* (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2019) can be an inspiration not only for the Czech Republic, but also for other countries.

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