

The Importance of Media Literacy from the Perspectives of School Teachers

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Abstract

In today's society, media, and particularly online media, has become an integral part of all our lives. In this context, media literacy plays a crucial role in schools as it helps students critically analyze the information they receive from the media, understanding both its possibilities and risks. This research focuses on the significance of incorporating media literacy into primary and secondary education curricula from the perspective of teachers in the Albanian context. The research aims to achieve several objectives, including the purpose of media literacy, the appropriate educational cycle to teach media literacy, teacher preparation for teaching media literacy, addressing media in the classroom, and the obstacles it faces. Media literacy enhances and strengthens critical thinking, thereby contributing to the development of informed and engaged citizens. This has a significant impact on future generations. To achieve the objectives, a quantitative and qualitative method was employed in this research. Three hundred and fifty-nine questionnaires were filled out elementary and secondary school teachers from both public and private schools. The questionnaire consisted of five sections, seeking the teachers' opinions on the importance of media education, its impact, the suitable educational cycle for implementing media literacy, their preparation to teach media literacy as a subject, their experiences in integrating media education into the curriculum, and the challenges they face in teaching media literacy in their classrooms. The questionnaire had 44 closed-ended questions in accordance with the Likert scale, and 2 open-ended questions. The data collected from the survey served as the basis for the study's results. The findings of this study indicate that media literacy, whether taught as a separate subject or integrated into other subjects, should be introduced in curricula of the lower cycle of studies. Teachers should receive training to effectively teach media literacy to students and help them develop essential competencies. The survey results demonstrate the progress made in media literacy over the past decade and suggest directions for future improvements.

Keywords: media literacy, school curriculum, the impact of media, critical thinking, primary and secondary education

1. Introduction

The pervasive influence of media, particularly online media, has become an integral part of our day-to-day lives in today's rapidly changing society (Livingstone, 2021). To effectively navigate this information-rich landscape, a critical examination of the impact of media and the development of media literacy skills is required (Hobbs, 2014). To empower students to engage with media content critically, comprehend its potentials and risks, and make informed decisions, media literacy education in schools plays a crucial role.

"The ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media in various forms" is what Jenkins calls media literacy (Jenkins, 2006). It entails giving people the skills they need to navigate the complicated media environment, comprehend the underlying messages, and engage in thoughtful and responsible media consumption and production.

The importance of media literacy in schools is treated by many researchers like (Baran, 2014), (Pavlik, 2018), and (McNulty, 2021). Media literacy is becoming more and more important for teachers because it can play a big role in helping students understand messages and know some ethical methods to produce their media.

There are some benefits to media literacy when it comes to students (Europe, 2022); (Fresno Pacific University Staff, 2018), (McNulty, 2021).

According to (UNESCO, 2022) media literacy and information literacy join interest groups together, be they individuals, communities, or nations to give a hand to the society of information. Therefore, there are three parts on which to focus when it comes to media literacy. Information, media, and digitalism are the three main categories of media literacy. If media literacy starts to be properly taught at school, children will surely learn how to find and utilize information for meaningful purposes, and will be able to distinguish between the types of content and their validity.

In the Albanian context, the country has had the highest growth of Internet users in recent years. Data show the use of ICT by individuals aged 16 to 74 that is increased by over 6% in comparison to 2018. Those who use the internet in their everyday life make up 87.1% and those who use the internet on average once a week compose 11.5% of the population.

Reasons for using the internet include getting information on services and goods that make up 50.2%; sending and receiving emails by 32.5%, to stream TV by 38.2%, and video and phone calls by 92.3% (Invest in Albania, 2021).

Compared to 1990 in the Albanian context, internet users made up 0% and in 2020 they reached 72.24% (Albania: Internet users, 2021). In 2021, internet users made up almost 2 million reaching a percentage of 69.6 (Invest in Albania, 2021). Such growth made possible ICT in our schools, as media literacy in Albania is not trained in the school curricula except for some extra curricula activities that take place in that regard. Information and the knowledge that teachers possess are sporadic. For instance, in 2021 "The practical manual for media literacy trainers" was published, and financed by the Youth European Foundation of

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the European Council. In 2021, there was a piloting of Media and Information Literacy skills (MIL) in formal education which has been a model to strengthen the collaboration of all interest groups in Albania (Musai, 2011)

According to (Aufderheide, 1997) teachers play a crucial role in developing students' media literacy skills, which enable them to navigate the vast ocean of information and evaluate media messages critically. Teachers empower students to become active participants in the media landscape rather than passive consumers by fostering media literacy skills.

The purpose of research conducted in Albania is to investigate the significance of including media literacy instruction in the primary and secondary education curricula. This review, expanding upon past examinations in the field, expects to explore the points of view of educators and their bits of knowledge on media proficiency training (Gjoka, 2020). This study aims to shed light on the successful integration of media literacy education into the Albanian primary and secondary education system by understanding the experiences, difficulties, and perspectives of teachers.

The purpose of media literacy, the appropriate educational cycle for its implementation, teacher preparation for teaching media literacy, addressing media in the classroom, and the challenges faced in its implementation are all included in the objectives of this study. This study aims to contribute to the discussion of media literacy and its role in shaping the next generation of critical thinkers and active citizens by addressing these aspects.

To achieve the examination targets, a quantitative exploration philosophy was utilized. Public and private elementary and secondary school teachers received a total of 359 questionnaires. The teachers' opinions on the importance and impact of media education, the best educational cycle for implementing media literacy, teacher preparation for teaching media literacy as a subject, experiences integrating media education into the curriculum, and difficulties encountered in teaching media literacy in the classroom were collected in five sections of the survey.

This study's findings will shed light on the current state of media literacy education in Albania and offer suggestions for future enhancements. This study aims to contribute to ongoing efforts to improve media literacy education by gaining an understanding of teachers' perspectives and experiences, ultimately fostering critical thinking skills and empowering students to effectively navigate the media landscape.

2. Methodology

The aim of this research is to explore and examine various aspects related to media literacy in the context of primary and secondary education in Albania. Specifically, the study aims to investigate the purpose of media literacy, determine the appropriate educational cycle for teaching media literacy, evaluate teacher preparation for teaching media literacy, examine the strategies for addressing media in the classroom, and identify the obstacles faced in implementing media literacy education. This study used a mixed-methods research design to

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gather comprehensive data on media literacy in pre-university education. This involved the collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data to address the research objectives effectively.

Therefore, the following research questions were proposed:

1. What is the perception of media literacy among teachers in primary and secondary education?
2. Which educational cycle is considered most appropriate for teaching media literacy in the Albanian schools context?
3. How adequately are teachers currently prepared to teach media literacy as part of their educational practice?
4. What strategies and approaches do teachers currently employ to address media literacy in the classroom?
5. What are the primary obstacles encountered by teachers in implementing media literacy education in pre-university settings?

The teachers of primary school were invited to participate in a questionnaire designed specifically for this research. The questionnaire was comprised of sections addressing the research objectives, including questions related to the purpose of media literacy, the appropriate educational cycle, teacher preparation, addressing media in the classroom, and obstacles faced. The responses collected from the sample formed the basis for the analysis and findings of the study.

2.1 Data collection

A survey questionnaire was developed based on the research questions and objectives. The survey included structured questions related to the purpose of media literacy, appropriate educational cycle, teacher preparation, addressing media literacy in the classroom, and obstacles faced. The data collected from the survey provided quantitative insights and enable statistical analysis.

Qualitative Data: In-depth interviews were conducted with a subset of teachers from the sample to gather qualitative data. The interviews allowed for a more detailed exploration of the teachers' experiences, perspectives, and challenges related to media literacy education. The interviews were semi-structured and were conducted in person or through online platforms. The qualitative data provided deeper insights into the research questions and complemented the quantitative findings.

Initially the questionnaire was conducted with a pilot sample of 118 participants, alumni of “Aleksandër Moisiu” University of Durrës, and from the factorial analysis of the data, Cronbach's Alpha (α) resulted .758.

Table 1. Questionnaire's Cronbach's alpha

Cronbach's alpha	Number of Questions
,758	46

The survey contains 5 sections and it is adapted from the questionnaire of Bradford L. Yates (Yates, 1997).

In the first section, which contains 12 questions, teachers gave their opinion on how they perceive the importance of media education and its impact on it. In the second session, teachers gave their opinion on the school cycle in which they think the development of media literacy is more appropriate in the 5 questions contained in this section. In the third section, with 6 questions, teachers gave their opinion on how prepared they feel to handle media literacy in their classrooms. The fourth section has 16 questions, one of which is an open question, in which the teachers wrote about their experiences in dealing with media education throughout the development of the curriculum. And in the last section, teachers were asked to give their opinion on the obstacles of teaching media education in schools. Responses to these questions aimed to indicate if media education has made any progress in the last decade and suggest a direction for the future.

In the results obtained from the pilot questionnaires to ensure the reliability, accuracy and validity of the results, over 70% of the teachers answered the questions in the same way, which allowed us to determine the sample size for the subsequent questionnaires. The questionnaires were distributed via Google Forms to “Aleksander Moisiu” University-Alumni in service teachers. Alumni students who participated in the piloting of the questionnaire were asked to distribute it to their colleagues at school.

Three hundred fifty-nine surveys (359) were filled out by public, private elementary, and secondary school in-service teachers from the prefectures of Tirana, Elbasan, Durrës, Tropojë, and Berat through a period of one week. Respondents read 46 statements and indicated to what degree they agreed or disagreed with each one. Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale (1-Strongly Agree, 5-Strongly Disagree). Topics of interest included goals for media education, described above. Additional demographic data was compiled, including age, gender, type of school (public or private), and grade level taught, years of teaching experience, professional media experience, media literacy training, and computer experience.

2.2 Sample collection

Demographic data revealed that 85.2% of the respondents were females and 14.8% were males, of which 82.3 worked in public schools and 17.3 in non-public schools. 26.1% of respondents worked in schools in rural areas and 73.9% in schools in urban areas. 39% of respondents were teachers in primary education, 7% were in secondary education, and 25% were teachers in secondary lower education. The rest were students attending a faculty that

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prepares teachers. 82% of the respondents had no experience in teaching media literacy, and only 14% of them had attended media literacy training.

3. Results of the study

The analysis of survey data on how teachers perceive the role of the media and its importance shows that, teachers accept the influence of students from the media and that it is important for students to be taught to analyze the messages that the media conveys, subjectivism in the media, and the correct information. In addition, a significant percentage (78%) of teachers think that it is important for students to understand how the media works. 76% of teachers accept the importance of media education in schools and 70% accept that media can be addictive. In addition, teachers claim that media literacy is important in developing critical thinking, distinguishing fact from fiction, and serving as a learning tool and source of information.

The data is presented in the following table for the statements:

1. Students are influenced heavily by visual messages in media.
2. Students are more influenced by TV/movies than by the printed word.
3. It is important students be taught to analyze media messages.
4. It is important students be taught how to detect bias in media.
5. It is important students be taught how to recognize false or misleading information in media.
6. It is important for students to understand media as a window into the world (i.e., a learning tool and source of information).
7. It is important for students to understand how to evaluate media critically.
8. It is important for students to understand that media content is subjective.
9. It is important for students to understand how to self-regulate their media use.
10. It is important for students to understand how to tell fact from fiction in media.
11. It is important for students to understand how media works.
It is important for students to understand that media can be hypnotic/addictive.

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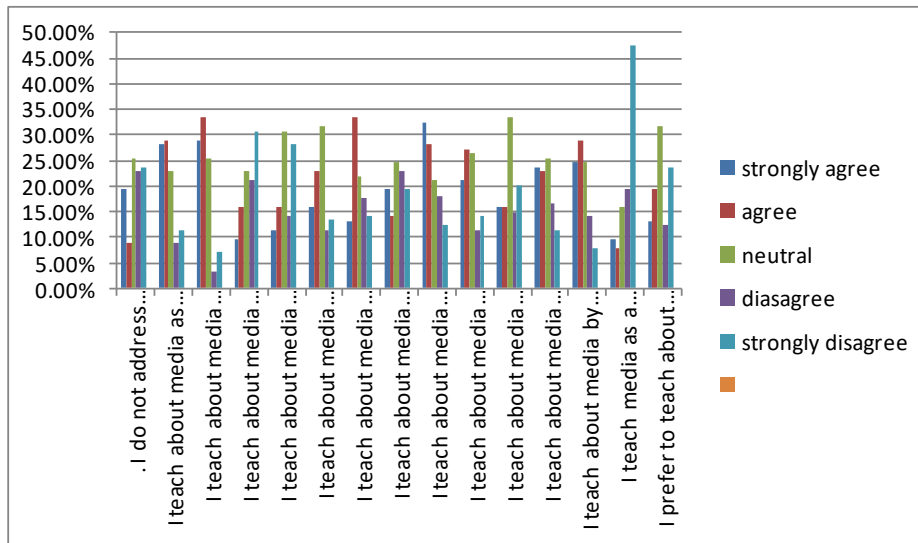


Figure 1: Importance of media literacy

Note. In section 2 of the survey, teachers expressed their opinions about the educational cycle in which they think media literacy can be taught.

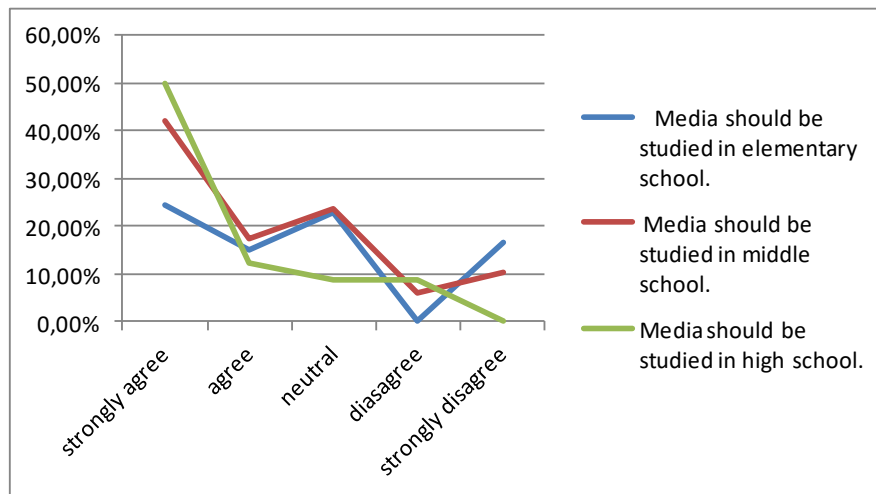
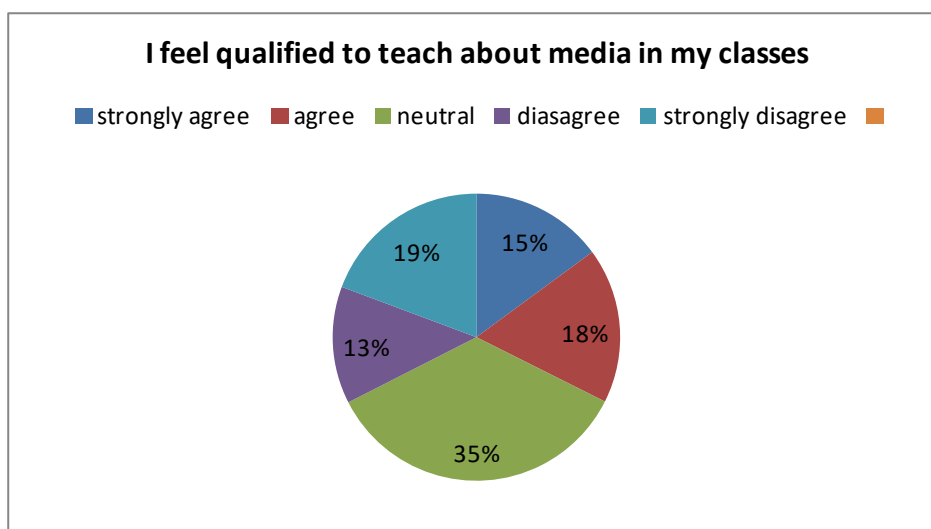


Figure 2: School cycle in which media literacy should continue

Note. The data in the graph below show that the teachers think that the cycle of education in which they think classes on media literacy should be conducted is high school (higher secondary education) and lower secondary education. 56% of the surveyed teachers claim that the examples taken from the media make the lesson more enjoyable and make it easier for the subject concepts to be understood better.

Figure 3: Teacher qualification to teach media literacy



Note. Regarding their qualification to handle media literacy in the classroom, it is evident that the teachers lack the qualification to handle media literacy in the classroom. 67% of respondents affirm that teacher training should be directed by teaching media literacy. The graph below shows these results more clearly. Over 67% of teachers think that social studies textbooks should contain more information on the media and its effects.

In our schools, Media literacy is not developed as a separate subject anymore, but as an extracurricular lesson, or integrated into specific topics of Civic Education, Albanian language, and literature and is not planned in the curricular framework of pre-university education. However, teachers deal with media literacy.

The graph below provides data on the reality of the development of media literacy in schools, according to the following statements.

1. I do not address media in the classroom.
2. I teach about media as part of specific themes.
3. I teach about media through spontaneous discussion.
4. I teach about media using newspapers.
5. I teach about media using magazines.
6. I teach about media using technical equipment.
7. I teach about media by discussing general TV viewing.
8. I teach about media using television.
9. I teach about media using the Internet.
10. I teach about media using media literacy curriculum resources.
11. I teach about media using media education videos.
12. I teach about media by discussing the role of advertising.
13. I teach about media by discussing the role of media in society.
14. I teach media as a formal subject.
15. I prefer to teach about media more often.

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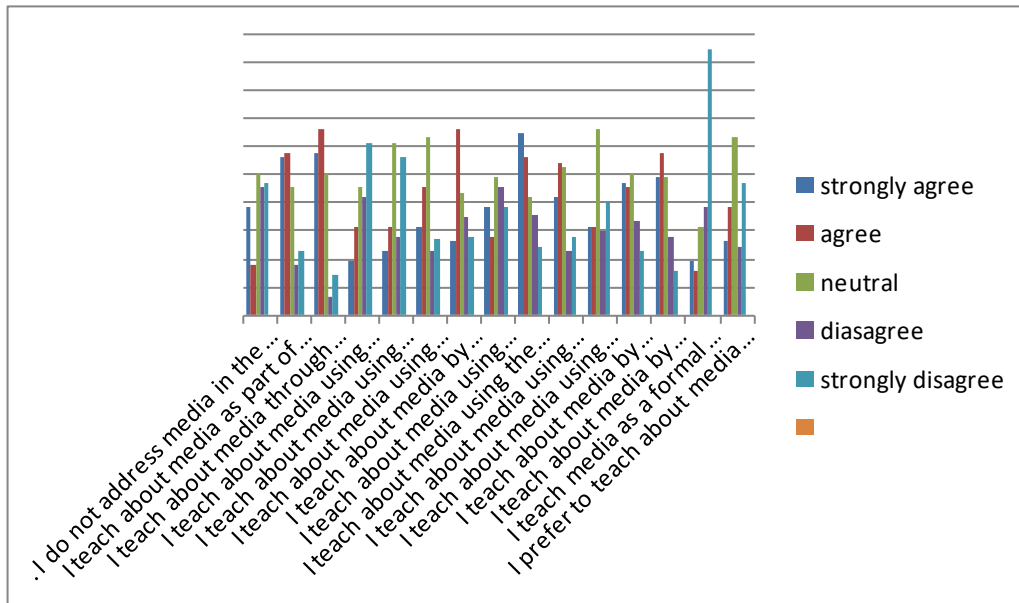


Figure 4: Teaching media literacy these days

Note. As can be seen from the graph above, teachers currently teach media literacy in special topics or during spontaneous discussions in classes, to the extent of about 20%. If we talk about barriers in the teaching of media education, the respondents have affirmed that, for the most part, the lack of equipment and materials is primary.

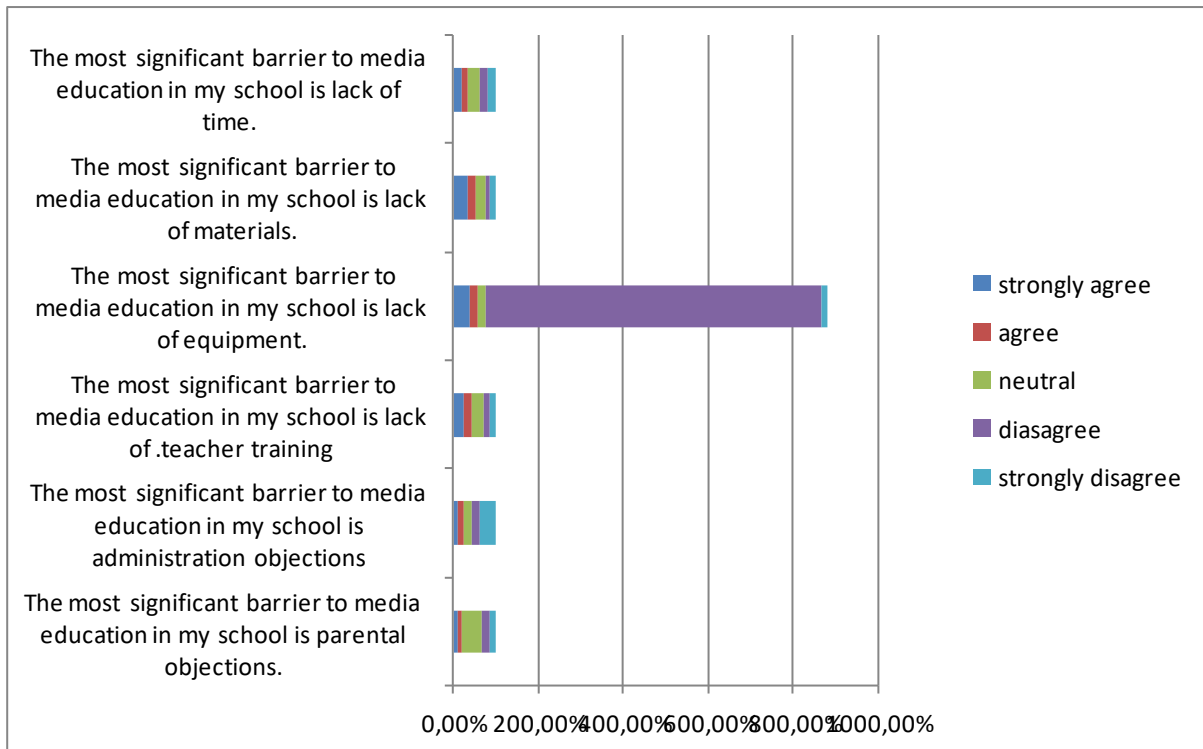


Figure 5: Factors that obstacle media literacy

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In addition to the statements of the survey, teachers had the opportunity to express their opinion on the teaching of media literacy in schools. In a large percentage, some teachers affirm that they find it interesting and time-consuming to teach media literacy in their classes.

Some of the comments that teachers have given regarding the topic of the questionnaire are as follows:

“The child needs to know more deeply the part of the media as well as to analyze the positive and negative effects with facts and not only in a theoretical way.”

“I like to alternate teaching with the media on certain topics when they affect our society.”

“I prefer to teach as it is very valuable for the student in these times we live in.”

“I like to integrate subject knowledge with information from the media.”

“Students must understand the importance of media in today's information, especially online media, knowing the hours that children spend using mobile phones, but it is important that for any information they receive, they must be able to use critical judgment to avoid falling prey to fake news.”

“Interesting topics.”

“It is a good idea to introduce it through schools and give it in the primary cycle.”

“People speak in the media as they think is best, but not everything that comes out well in the public eye is good.”

“People must become aware and look at things objectively, and this thinking education must start in schools.”

“I like the idea of such a subject because it attracts children/students to the world of art/creativity, painting, music, and theater, but it is also like a kind of yoga/relaxation to get children thinking, and imagining how they can play the role of the teacher, the journalist, etc.”

“I like this topic, there is a lot of need to be part of the education of the generations who are very connected to the phone, media, and the Internet.”

But teachers need training and educational material suitable for the development of media literacy. Today's teachers, especially in rural but also urban areas, need training, materials, and conditions.

4. Conclusion

It turns out that teachers are responsible for the role of media literacy in primary and secondary education. The need to analyze the messages that the media conveys, the difference between fact and fiction, and the regulation of the relationship with the media, are elements that teachers consider important for the formation of students, to consider a critical point of view, to understand how the media function, to understand don't get addicted to it.

The second question of the research: in which school cycle should the education on media literacy be developed, the respondents affirm that media education should be started in the lower cycle of studies and should be expanded more after the lower cycle of studies. The

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treatment of media topics is preferable to be developed more in the social sciences, especially civic education and the Albanian language.

The results of the study show that teachers do not feel competent to teach media literacy in their classes, due to the lack of training and the fact that it is not included in school curricula. Until now, they have dealt with media literacy in their special or extracurricular subjects and they feel unprepared for dealing with media literacy because there is a lack of suitable equipment and materials for dealing with it.

In terms of critical thinking, media literacy on what children see, read, and hear helps them to analyze information from different perspectives. Besides many benefits, it can also teach about various cultures, and ideas not considered before. Media literacy is part of the curriculum of Albanian pre-university education, different from other places of the world, but its importance in today's age is necessary because it aids students in their future. Integrating media with teaching can be used to present the subject and raise awareness of how it influences how we see the world and how it influences society and politics. Media literacy makes it possible for students to benefit from learning ways that enable them to fully participate in public life, community life, and economic life.

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