MIL POLICIES AND E-READING PROBLEMS IN THE CONTEXT OF MEDIA ECOLOGY

Prof. Dobrinka PEICHEVA - SWU, BULGARIA;
Prof. Lilia RAYCHEVA – SU, BULGARIA
The evolution of mass media towards personalization, interactivity and mobility, as well as the media engagement of all social spheres, institutions and groups, has provoked a number of transformations in the society. Through different media, e-reading and writing have become the main communication activities in today's mediatized society.

At the same time, the media and information literacy of people in the new digital environment is becoming more and more complex, but also more and more up-to-date.

From the state of media education, the changing conditions depend both on dealing with information flows and on the skills for their processing and interpretation.
Developing in two different and zealously protecting its territory fields - pedagogy and media studies, media education has not yet positioned itself in the relevant media ecology framework in almost all European countries.

There are still no European or national mandatory requirements that would have outlined its parameters in the educational systems.
This study is an attempt to enter the problems that accompany media education in Bulgaria, connected with media ecology literacy. Recommendations are made for the future positioning of the relevant issues of media ecology literacy in the European context and problems of e-reading. Media education is seen in its historical roots, legal policy framework and capacity building. Recommendations have been made for the future of media education in the new media ecosystem.
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Media literacy education in Bulgaria

Media literacy education is a relatively new branch in the Bulgarian educational system. It is based on access to and participation in all media - traditional and new and involves obtaining skills for understanding of media content, as well as of their interpretation and critical reflection in different contexts. Media literacy is a key prerequisite for active citizenship, overcoming the risks of a different nature.
In the 1960s and 70s in Bulgaria a need was felt to establish a scientific discipline combining pedagogy and media in response to the many problems arising from the growing influence of the media on people of different age groups.

This discipline has developed under different names, such as media literacy, media education, etc.
Initially the preferred term in Bulgaria was "media education", but later on “media literacy” became widely accepted.
The course “Media Pedagogy” was firstly approved for the academic year 2003/2004 in the MA program on Public Communications within the framework of UNESCO’s Department of Communication and PR at the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski.

The first Bulgarian thesis on media pedagogy was defended in the Faculty, and in 2011, at New Bulgarian University; Ralitsa Filipova defended the first doctoral dissertation on media literacy in Bulgaria.
Information literacy, computer literacy and digital literacy are more popular in Bulgaria than media literacy. It may be said that these three terms have mainly been associated with media literacy by university teachers and NGO activists in this sphere. While the initiatives of some universities and NGOs contribute to media literacy, there is yet no explicit agenda or active national strategy with respect to this goal. None of the official documents of the Ministry of Education and Science contains specific references to the need for media and information literacy in educational structures. The European texts concerning the inclusion of media literacy in schools have not been taken into account – not even in the new draft education act.
The role of media literacy is clearly understood and emphasized mainly by researchers, who view media education as a mechanism for alleviating the problems of the educational system. The most important agent in this respect should be the state, the legislative and executive sphere.

Moreover, target groups of today’s media education are not only children and young people, but also older people and people with disabilities; this means there is a broad basis for expanding the scope of media literacy among the general public.
LEGAL POLICY FRAMEWORK

There is no official designation or legal definition of media literacy. It has been associated with digital culture, digital competence as components of media literacy. Most researchers, media workers, and NGO experts have adopted the European definition of media literacy as *the ability to access the media, to understand and to critically evaluate different aspects of the media and media contents, and to create communications in a variety of contexts*, which has been validated by a large majority of the respondents to the public consultation and by the members of the Media Literacy Expert Group.

They have seen media messages as informational and creative contents in forms of texts, sounds and images carried by different forms of communication means - tv, cinema, video, websites, radio, video games and virtual communities.
From the researcher’s point of view media literacy includes all dimensions of the European approach to media literacy in the digital environment:

- understanding all aspects of existing media - from newspapers to virtual communities;

- actively using media, through, *inter alia*, interactive television, use of Internet search engines or participation in virtual communities, and better exploitation of the potential of the media for entertainment, access to culture, intercultural dialogue, learning and daily-life applications (for instance, through libraries, podcasts);
• having a critical approach to media as regards both quality and accuracy of content (for example, being able to access information related to advertising in various media by using search engines intelligently);

• using media creatively, given that the evolution of media technologies and the increasing presence of the Internet as a distribution channel allow an ever growing number of Europeans to create and disseminate images, information and content;

• understanding the economy of media and the difference between pluralism and media ownership;

• being aware of copyright issues, which is essential for a "culture of legality", especially among the younger generation in its double capacity of consumers and producers of content.
The Bulgarian legal document referring to media literacy is the Act on pre-school and school education 2015, specifically its article 77 (1).

But the mentioned Act contains no official designation of media literacy, and media education is not explicitly connected in it to resource allocation. Media literacy is only implicit in this new law. Nor does it designate a clear authority overseeing media education. It would be reasonable for this to be a prerogative of the Ministry of Education and Science but no special resources are allocated in this respect.

The legal documents - acts, recommendations, etc. – that serve as a framework for media education policies fail to reflect the issue of media literacy.
Media education is the responsibility of various departments in the Ministry of Education, and there is no specialized department there dealing with this specific area.

Various departments in the Ministry (such as those of General Education, Vocational Education, Higher Education, Youth Activities) have media education as one of their priorities, insofar as it relates to the overall digital culture and digital education of young people in schools and universities.

There is no Strategic Plan for Media Education for the use of school teachers. There are no laws stipulating the inclusion of media education in primary and secondary education. In terms of resources, though schools are technologically equipped to a satisfactory degree, there is no special curriculum on media literacy.
Official government media policies on the role of teachers in the field of media literacy are lacking in Bulgaria – both with regard to their qualification and pre-qualification and to their role in student’s training at all educational levels.

In Bulgaria media education, with a stress on media literacy, is taught mainly in universities. In schools media literacy problems are tackled more or less by the independent activities of lecturers, whose work in this respect is linked to their participation in international programs and projects.
The different forms and varieties of media training in Bulgaria are mainly positioned:

1. *Within university frameworks* - in bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral programs at different faculties and departments; at scientific centers, research seminars, laboratories and other university units;

2. *Within the sphere of non-government organizations*, as the subject of their constant work in organizing lecture courses, international seminars, discussions, etc.;

3. *In mobile “ad hoc” formations* connected with international or national projects more or less related to media literacy. These mobile formations have initiatives connected with the realization of project aims and tasks, but have no policies for implementing and continuing these activities and initiatives afterwards.
Training activities by these three types of actors have been and continue to be realized in all educational grades (kindergarten/primary school/junior high/high school).

1. *Within university frameworks*: lecturers in accredited units connected with media education (journalism, public relations, media pedagogy, etc.) are qualified in the respective profile. Their involvement with media education stems from their education and/or academic degree. Usually people dealing with media problems at universities and non-government organizations hold bachelor’s, master’s or PhD degrees in the field. For other lecturers - those working in areas outside media, but with some relation to these - media education is also a part of their respective degree. Such are the lecturers in departments of sociology, pedagogy, philosophy, cultural studies, library science, economics, etc.
Media disciplines taught or discussed in the different scientific educational units are predominantly connected with studies for the bachelor's, master's or PhD degree and are primarily mandatory specialized training courses.

Usually the separate courses on media education number 30 to 60 hours per year and represent predominantly mandatory disciplines.

The accredited curricula existing at the different universities are predominantly mandatory both in master’s and bachelor’s programs.
The basic results are connected with the knowledge of, for example:

- theories on the formation of internet era media competence in different age groups, take into consideration age group and multicultural environment particularities;
- positive practices in the activities of the European Union for the construction of an European cultural identity;
- practices of application of multi-media for the needs of education;
- informing different age groups about currently important social problems of the democratic development of Bulgaria;
- variants of educating people so as to prepare them for active participation in social life;
- patterns of democratic citizenship and association.
Higher specialized media education in the form of bachelor’s, master’s and PhD programs as well as individual disciplines and specializations in the fields of media, journalism or public relations in Bulgaria are available in major public and private universities, such as Sofia University, University of National and World Economy, New Bulgarian University, Southwest University, American University in Bulgaria, etc.

Sofia University, the largest and most prestigious Bulgarian university, uniquely offers a specialized bachelor's degree in media pedagogy at its Faculty of Preschool Education. The designation is “Pedagogy of Mass and Art Communication.”
2. Within the sphere of non-government organizations: NGOs are also involved in activities related to media literacy. This refers to various foundations and associations, some of which have long years of experience in organizing training courses, lectures, international seminars, discussions, etc.

No statistical data are available for Bulgaria regarding the number of events held and the hours allocated to this activity. Such a statistical account cannot be made due to the absence of systematic data in the public domain and the unwillingness of some organizations to share data.
The main areas of their activities can be summarized to:

- training courses in language skills for media;
- education and training for media professionals and journalism students in Bulgaria;
- training courses in language skills for media;
- support for the development of the free media market;
- development and implementation of media projects in Bulgaria and abroad;
- research, consultancy and information services on media and for the media;
- publication of media-related books and training materials;
- media promoting events; conferences, round-tables, discussions.
3. Within mobile “ad hoc” education: this forms are of mixed nature. They include various categories of professionals - scientists, experts from NGOs, teachers, etc. Participation is usually along the lines of international and national projects. The groups are formed within the framework of the concrete projects and do not continue beyond the duration of the projects.

Unlike the other two forms, ad hoc participation is generally marked by insufficient long or short-term effectiveness of the implementation of activities (actually, this kind of inefficiency is also typical for many other project performance).
Funding
There is no official funding policy specifically for media literacy. Media education is situated in the framework of official education policies and their funding. The resources of media literacy are usually financed by university funds, by government projects funds, by international project funds or EU funds, etc. There is no official information concerning funding, this issue usually lacks transparency. The financial reports of non-governmental organizations are available to the public via the Internet only in rare cases. Some resources of training programs are funded by university funds, others by project funds.
Evaluation mechanisms (inside and outside school)

There are no legal mechanisms to ensure and measure the efficiency of media education policies.

Legal mechanisms are official institutions for measurement of media education official government ratings of universities and their specialties and National Agency for Accreditation and Evaluation.

Media education is predominantly targeted at the younger generation. But no formal quantitative data about how many people to focus their efforts, and how many and what types of programs are available to targeted groups. There are quite a few media education programmes but yearly reports on them are prepared only in a few cases.
CONCLUSION AND GENERAL APPRECIATION
To give in brief our general view on the relevance of the media education policies in the national media system and in the national school system, we should say that they are not significant, efficient or relevant (Angelov, 2005; Damianova, 1996; Kirova, 2013; Marinov, 2013; Milenkova, 2011; Raycheva, 2011; Peicheva, 2014; Zlateva, 2009, 2013; Popova, 2013; Stefanova, 2013).
There are discrepancies between the legal framework and the actual performance of the actors inside and outside schools. The actual performance of the actors is better in quality than official government policies, which are not satisfactory.
The unwillingness to structural changes and new opportunities for improvement are due to lack of understanding, and underestimation of the importance of the e-reading and media literacy in frame of adequate media ecosystem. As a result, there is a lack of awareness of the importance of e-reading and media literacy, the media literacy results of teachers and students are inadequate, interest does not continue after the end of the project, and there is a lack of concern with regard to establishing official media education and e-reading policies.
The digital convergence might be a challenge for all these different actors to create new forms of cooperation and effectiveness.

The successful meeting of this challenge will depend on our critical concern. The positive result might be the launching of new initiatives for media ecology literacy and legislation relative to it, connected with media ecology.

Bulgarian universities are the most significant place for realizing effective media and information literacy and education in frame of media ecology.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BETTER POSITIONING OF MEDIA and information LITERACY IN EU COUNTRIES

1. MIL should be a subject taught within the framework of compulsory education;

2. MIL training should focus on teachers, professionals and students;

3. Many European countries need to have a special EU directive for including media and information literacy in their national education legislation and curriculums (one such country is Bulgaria);

4. It would be a good idea:
   - for a world network of MIL training institutions to be established; to set up an Information Centre and network responsible solely for project support in the field of MIL; to enhance the professional and qualification criteria for participation in MIL projects at world level.