THE INFLUENCE OF MEDIA LITERACY ON THE SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

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Abstract

Media literacy plays a major role in the process of social integration of children with disabilities, enabling them to engage in the community according to their needs, interests, and opportunities. In many cases, these children can feel isolated or excluded from society because of their disabilities. Media literacy can provide them with access to information, communication with others, and the opportunity to participate in a variety of activities and experiences. The purpose of this research is to gain a more detailed understanding of the impact media literacy has on social integration among children with disabilities and to identify opportunities to improve their access to media literacy and social integration. The research is based on a survey questionnaire used as a data collection method from 15 parents of children with disabilities and 15 teachers. Methodology: The survey contains questions that explore the frequency of media use, the impact of media literacy on social integration, participation in activities through the lens of media literacy, challenges, and resources in using media literacy, as well as recommendations for improving access to media literacy for children with disabilities. Results and conclusions: The results showed that the implementation of media literacy can significantly improve the social integration of children with disabilities, by providing access to information, communication with the environment, and the opportunity to participate in various activities. Based on the obtained results, recommendations are provided for the development of programs and interventions aimed at supporting these children in society.

Keywords: media literacy, children with disabilities, social integration

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Introduction

In today's digital society, media literacy plays a key role in the development of the individual and social skills of children. Television, the Internet, social media, and video games – the media platforms provide a wide variety of content and interactions that have a significant impact on their social and cognitive development. In this context, researching the impact media literacy has on social integration among children with disabilities represents a significant aspect of the education and development of children with different types of disabilities. In recent decades, media literacy has become an inevitable part of our everyday lives and has a significant share in the way we communicate, learn, and have fun. The importance of media literacy in today's inclusive society is very big, therefore children with disabilities should not be left out in this process. Media literacy plays a major role in the process of social integration among children with disabilities, enabling them to engage in the community according to their needs, interests, and opportunities. In many cases, these children can feel isolated or excluded from society because of their disabilities. Media literacy can provide them with access to information, communication with others, and the opportunity to participate in a variety of activities and experiences. Media literacy consists of skills and competencies for understanding, interpreting and critically reading media content. For children with disabilities, who may face physical, sensory, cognitive, or communication challenges, accessing and participating in media culture may present additional challenges or obstacles. In many cases, these children may face barriers such as a lack of media resources and lack of support for using media in their learning and development. However, media literacy can be an important instrument for their social integration and participation in the community – an opportunity for them to explore different aspects of the world around them, to develop critical skills, and to help them build their social networks and relationships. Media literacy is not only important for the individual advancement of a person with a disability, but it is also relevant for promoting a complete societal change in terms of understanding, equality, and inclusion. Media literacy for persons with disabilities cannot be achieved solely through individual efforts. Media platforms and manufacturers of devices must take responsibility for ensuring accessibility and promoting inclusive representation of disabilities in their products and content. This entails investing in accessibility features, consulting with disability communities about design and content, and taking responsibility for violations of accessibility standards. Media literacy for people with disabilities is an essential skill to get by in our world today. The research on the impact of media literacy on social integration among children with disabilities has a significant influence on practice and policies for the education and support of this population. Understanding this aspect of their development can contribute to improving the conditions for their social inclusion and for a better quality of life. In addition, research can stimulate debates and interventions on inclusion and equality in society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Media literacy refers to all types of media, including television and film, radio and recorded music, print media, the Internet, and other new digital communication technologies. It is important to emphasize that, although online media have a central place in informing citizens in many countries, in the Republic of North Macedonia, according to the analysis of the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services, most of the citizens still use traditional media (television and radio) as sources of information. Regardless of the different sources, media outlets, in general, are fertile ground for deviant media phenomena, and therefore urgent updating of media literacy and education is necessary. This is

especially important for children with disabilities and their social integration. Most of the international research shows that media literacy can have a positive effect on the social interaction and learning of children with disabilities, thereby enabling them to access information, develop communication skills, and participate in various aspects of the community. The research of Johnson et al. (2019) "The Impact of Media Literacy on Social Integration of Children with Disabilities" explains the impact media literacy has on social integration among children with disabilities. The results of this research show that there are positive relationships between media literacy and social integration, especially among children with autism and communication disabilities, while the "Media Literacy and Social Inclusion of Children with Disabilities: A Review of Current Research" study by Harris and Smith (2020) analyzes different approaches and methods to support these children through media literacy and makes conclusions about best practices and needs for future research. "Digital Media Literacy and Social Participation of Children with Disabilities" research by Kim et al. (3028) explores the link between digital media literacy and the social participation of children with disabilities. The results show that digital media literacy can have a significant positive effect on the social participation and interaction of these children. "Media Literacy and Social Inclusion of Children with Disabilities: Strategies for Teachers" study by Smith and Davidson (2021) provides an overview of strategies and approaches that teachers can use to support the social integration of children with disabilities through media literacy. This overview identifies best practices and suggests practical advice for implementation. "Exploring the Impact of Media Literacy Education on Social Inclusion of Children with Disabilities: A Longitudinal Study" is a paper by Kovacevic et al. (2020) that investigates the long-term effects of the media literacy education on the social integration of children with disabilities. Using a longitudinal methodology, the authors analyze changes in the social interaction and participation of children over time. A research by Brown and Jones (2019) "Digital Media Literacy and Social Skills Development in Children with Physical Disabilities" explores the relationship between digital media literacy and the development of social skills in children with physical disabilities. The results emphasize the importance of digital literacy in supporting the social interaction and communication of these children. "Parental Perspectives on Media Use and Social Integration of Children with Intellectual Disabilities" is a research by Garcia et al. (2017) that analyzes parents' perceptions of media use and their impact on the social integration of children with intellectual disabilities. By interviewing the parents, the authors explore various aspects of this topic. "The Role of Assistive Technology in Promoting Media Literacy for Children with Sensory Disabilities" is a research by Lee et al (2021) that is an overview of the role assistive technologies have in supporting media literacy for children with sensory disabilities. The authors analyze different types of assistive technologies and their potential for improving media literacy in these children. All these examples from literature additionally show the various approaches and aspects of research related to the impact media literacy has on the social integration of children with disabilities. In RN Macedonia, as well as in other countries, there are initiatives, programs, and research that focus on supporting these children through media literacy. It includes campaigns and training for teachers, educational resources, and adapted media content which makes it possible to undertake various activities aimed at improving the access and participation of children with disabilities in the media culture. In Macedonia, as in many other countries, there are several challenges and opportunities for improving the access and participation of children with disabilities in the media culture. One of the challenges is to ensure media resources and content that are adapted to the different needs and abilities of these children. It is also necessary to provide training and assistance for teachers and parents so that they can support children in developing media literacy and their participation in media activities. On the other hand, opportunities for cooperation between government institutions, educational institutions, non-governmental organizations, and media companies can be essential to create favorable conditions for inclusion of children with disabilities in the media culture. This cooperation can be an opportunity for creating programs and resources that are tailored to their needs and capabilities.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research is to explore the impact media literacy has on the social integration of children with disabilities, that is, to gain insight into how media literacy can affect the ability of these children to integrate into the community, including the development of social skills and how can they be improved. The research used a survey questionnaire as a data collection method from 15 parents of children with disabilities and 15 teachers, investigating the perceptions and experiences of these parents and teachers. The survey contains questions that explore the frequency of media use, the impact of media literacy on social integration, participation in activities through media literacy, challenges, and resources for using media literacy, as well as recommendations for improved access to media literacy for children with disabilities. In particular, the research focuses on the following questions: How does access to different media platforms and content affect the social integration of children with disabilities? What are the most effective ways to develop media literacy among this population and how does this affect their social inclusion? Which factors have the greatest importance for the successful social integration of children with disabilities in the context of media literacy? The survey data was subjected to statistical analysis to implement qualitative and quantitative approaches and to ensure a full analysis of the impact media literacy has on social integration in children with disabilities. These practices and conclusions can serve as a basis for developing programs and interventions to support these children and their communities.

The research sets out several hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Children with disabilities who have access to a variety of media and technologies for media literacy will have greater opportunities for social integration in various joint activities and interactions.

Hypothesis 2: The use of specially designed media content and applications for children with disabilities will have a positive effect on their social skills and involvement in different social contexts.

Hypothesis 3: Children with disabilities who have support and training in the use of media literacy will show greater self-confidence and ability to successfully interact in a social manner in different situations.

Hypothesis 4: Parents and teachers who have a positive attitude towards the use of media literacy as part of educational process of children with disabilities will be more likely to support them in their social integration and development. The answers to these set hypotheses provide information about the use and impact of media literacy in children with disabilities, as well as the attitudes and needs of teachers and parents.

FINDINGS/RESULTS

Media literacy is something that is becoming an increasing necessity in society today, where technological advances are constantly changing the ways of communication and interaction. When it comes to children with disabilities, access to media content can be a key aspect of their social and cognitive development. At the same time, however, there are challenges and dangers associated with the use of media, especially when it comes to children

with disabilities. This research is important because it allows us to understand the impact of media literacy on the social integration of children with disabilities. By obtaining a detailed overview of this aspect of their development, we can tailor-made dedicated interventions and programs that will support them in their process of learning and growth. In addition, the research has the potential to contribute to the introduction of policies and strategies that will create a suitable environment for the development and inclusion of children with disabilities in society. In addition to identifying challenges, opportunities, and needs of this population, this research can also identify the interests of the wider community, including parents, and teachers (professionals). By understanding the importance of media literacy and its impactful potential, together we can create a better and dedicated environment for the development of children with disabilities. The research analyzed the results of survey questionnaires obtained from two target groups: parents and teachers of children with disabilities. Here are the answers to the questionnaire that surveyed the teachers of children with disabilities:

Question 1: How often do you use different types of media literacy in your teaching with children with disabilities? Answers: 40% of the teachers answered Regularly; 45% said Occasionally; 10% said Rarely; and 5% said Never.

Question 1:



- audio
- occasionally
- rarely
- never
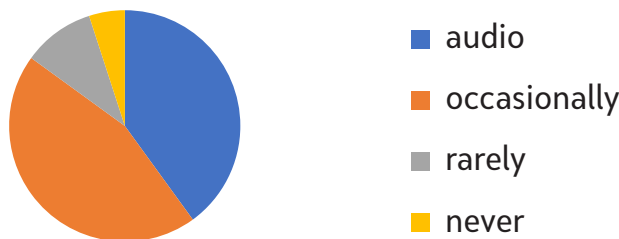
Question 2: What specific media resources or applications do you use to support the learning and social integration of children with disabilities? The most common answers are Audiobooks: 25%; Educational websites: 30%; Educational apps: 20%; Learning games: 15%; and Other: 10%.

Question 2:

- audiobooks
- websites
- educational apps
- learning games
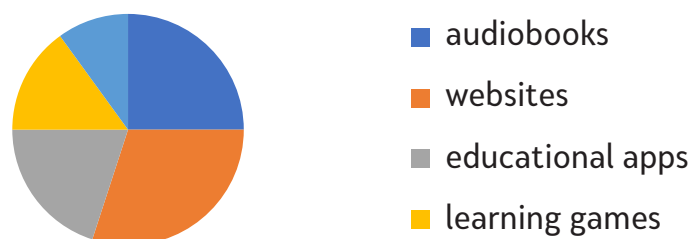
Question 3: Is your teaching material adapted to the needs of children with disabilities, including the aspect of media literacy? 60% of the teachers answered Yes, and 40% said No.

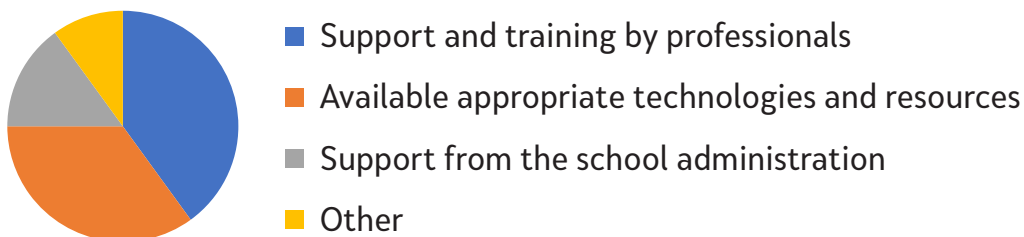**Question 3:**

Legend:
- Yes
- No
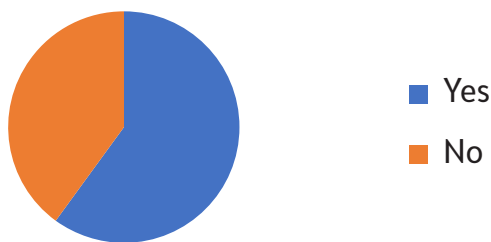
Question 4: What challenges do you face in including media literacy in the teaching process for children with disabilities? The most common answers are Lack of training and support: 35%; Lack of appropriate resources and technologies: 25%; Adaptation of material to different needs: 20%; and Other: 20%.

Question 4:

Legend:
- Lack of training and support
- Lack of appropriate resources
- Adaptation of material to different needs
- Other
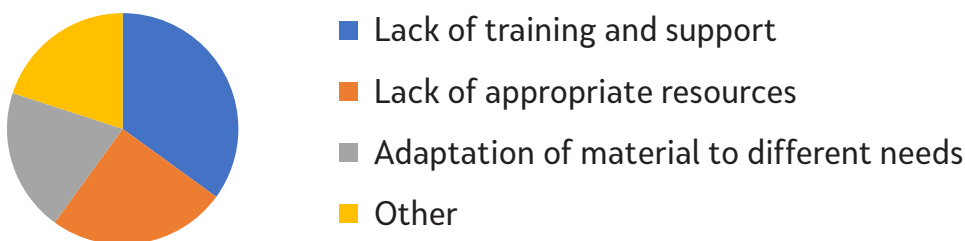
Question 5: What support and resources do you need to effectively integrate the aspect of media literacy in your teaching with children with disabilities? Answers: Support and training by professionals: 40%; Available appropriate technologies and resources: 35%; Support from the school administration: 15%; and Other: 10%.

Question 5

Legend:
- Support and training by professionals
- Available appropriate technologies and resources
- Support from the school administration
- Other

Question 6: To what extent do you think that the use of media literacy can have a positive effect on the social integration and learning of children with disabilities? 50% of the teachers answered that it has a Very positive effect; 40% that it has a Positive effect; 5% answered it has a Neutral effect; and 5% said it has a Negative effect.
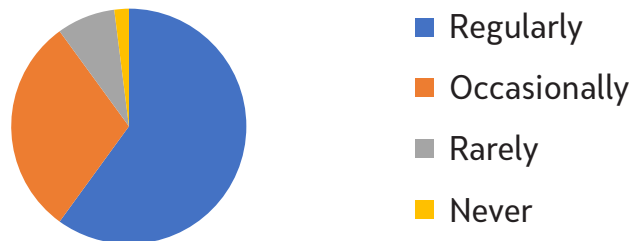
Question 6:

Legend:
- Very positive effect
- Positive effect
- Neutral effect
- Negative effect
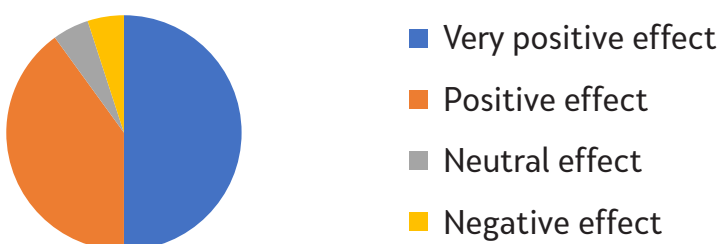
Here are the responses of parents of children with disabilities:

Question 1: How often does your child use the following media: computers, tablets, and smartphones? 60% of parents said Regularly; 30% of the parents said Occasionally; 8% said Rarely; and 2% said never.

Question 1:


- Regularly
- Occasionally
- Rarely
- Never

Question 2: What types of media does your child prefer? Answers: Games: 45%; Educational apps: 30%; Videos and movies: 15%; Social media: 10%.

Question 2:

- Games
- Educational apps
- Video and movies
- Social media
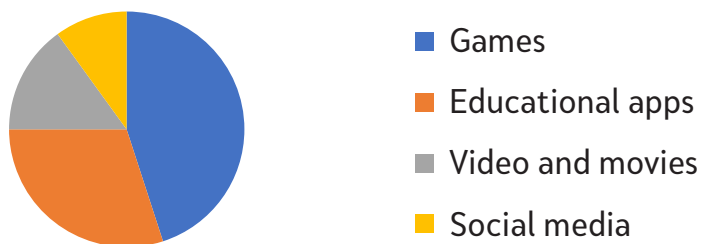
Question 3: Have you noticed an improvement in the social interaction of your child since he/she started using media? 70% of the parents answered with Yes, and 30% said No.
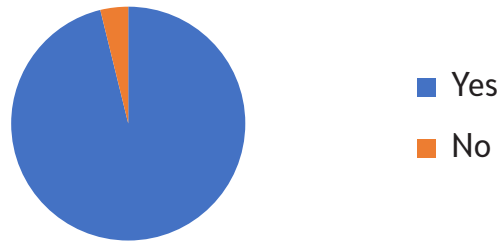
Question 3:

- Yes
- No
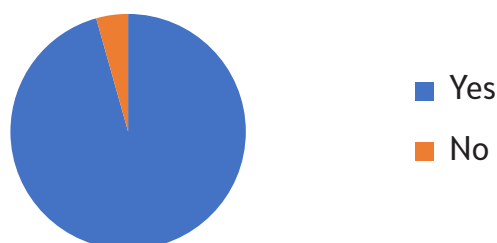
Question 4: How often does your child communicate with others through the media? Often: 45%; Occasionally: 45%; Rarely: 10%.

Question 4:
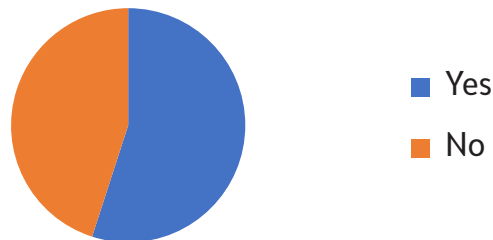

- Often
- Occasionally
- Rarely
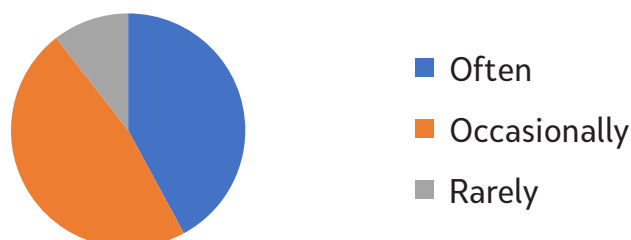
Question 5: Do you think media literacy has a positive impact on the learning and development of your child? 80% of parents answer with Yes; and 20% with No.
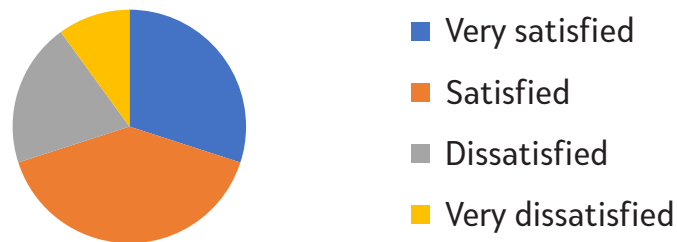
Question 5:

Question 6: Do you think that your child receives enough support and training in the use of media? Yes was the answer by 55%, and No was the answer by 45%.

Question 6:

Question 7: How satisfied are you with the way your child uses media in learning and development? Very satisfied: 30%; Satisfied: 40%; Dissatisfied: 20%; and Very dissatisfied: 10%.

Question 7:

These results provide information on the use and impact of media literacy in children with disabilities and also show the attitudes and needs of their teachers and parents.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Many studies indicate that the use of media, such as games, applications, and websites, can provide opportunities for children with disabilities to engage in a variety of activities and improve their social connections. The results of the research proved that media literacy has a positive effect on the social integration of children with disabilities. All hypotheses in the research were

confirmed. Children with disabilities who have access to a variety of media and technologies for media literacy have greater opportunities for social integration in joint activities and interactions. The use of specially designed media content and applications for children with disabilities has a positive effect on their social skills and involvement in different social contexts. Children with disabilities who have support and training in the use of media literacy demonstrate greater self-confidence and ability to successfully interact socially in a variety of situations. Parents and teachers who have a positive attitude towards the use of media literacy as part of the educational process of children with disabilities are more likely to support them in their social integration and development. It is pointed out that the results of this research have important implications for the educational system, as well as for parents and teachers who work with children with disabilities. The conclusion from the questionnaire intended for teachers of children with disabilities is that the use of media literacy is widespread, but not universal. Although a significant part of teachers use media literacy in their teaching, there is also a significant number of them who do not yet use this aspect in their practice. There is a need for training and support about the use of media literacy for children with disabilities, which is a challenge for the development of practice in education. There is a lack of resources and technologies and that is an obstacle for effective implementation of media literacy in the teaching process. Overall, the teachers express positive attitudes and perceptions about the impact of media literacy on the social integration and learning of children with disabilities, which confirms the importance of this aspect in education. These conclusions emphasize the importance of support and training for teachers, as well as the need for investment in resources and technologies for successful implementation of media literacy in the educational process for children with disabilities. Conclusion from the questionnaire intended for parents of children with disabilities is that the media literacy has positive impact on social interaction and learning. The parents express satisfaction with the way their children use media in learning and development, which indicates positive experiences and perceptions. These conclusions confirm the importance of parental support and the development of educational programs for promotion of media literacy in children with disabilities, which could lead to better social integration and successful learning. The research also confirms that children with disabilities who have access to and participate in various media activities have a higher probability of successful social integration. Support from parents and teachers, as well as access to specialized educational resources, is a key in the process of developing media literacy and social integration. There is a necessity for inclusive practices - the implications of the research recall the importance of inclusive practices in education and society as a whole, which includes access to media literacy for all children. The conclusion is that it is necessary to continue with research and with the development of programs and policies that support children with disabilities in acquiring media literacy and achieving social integration. With these conclusions, the research has significant potential to influence the practice and policies for support of children with disabilities to empower them for successful integration and participation in society.

LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The individual needs and challenges of children with disabilities should be taken into account. The analysis of results should take into account that the needs and challenges of children with disabilities can be different. Media literacy programs should be tailored to meet the individual needs of each child. Continued research and improvement of media literacy programs for children with disabilities is needed. Improved programs can lead to better social integration and the development of communication skills in these children. If research is conducted directly with children or persons with disabilities, researchers have a special responsibility to respect the rights

and interests of vulnerable groups at all stages of the research process. Individuals belonging to a vulnerable group are not always able to protect their rights and interests in the process of communication with researchers. They may also be reluctant to participate in research for fear of expressing their opinions or emotions in front of other people. On the other hand, researching their opinions, attitudes, experiences, and reactions to potentially harmful media content is of crucial importance for the development of programs and specific activities for their protection from such content and for the development of policies that lead to media content in which they their rights and interests are respected. Because of all that, researchers who collect information about the media literacy of vulnerable groups are required to adopt a procedure of informing these groups and obtaining consent from them to participate in the research. They should also be particularly careful not to use classifications, descriptions, and terms that stereotype or stigmatize members of these groups. By implementing these conclusions and recommendations, we can create a basis for improving programs and practices related to media literacy in children with disabilities and support them in their development and integration into the community.

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Annex

ANNEX 1

Survey questionnaire for teachers

1. How often do you use different types of media literacy when you teach children with disabilities?

2. What specific media resources or applications do you use to support the learning and social integration of children with disabilities?

3. Is your teaching material adapted to the needs of children with disabilities, including the aspect of media literacy?

4. What challenges do you face in including media literacy in the teaching process for children with disabilities?

5. What support and resources do you need to effectively integrate media literacy into your teaching with children with disabilities?

6. To what extent do you think that the use of media literacy can have a positive effect on the social integration and learning of children with disabilities?

ANNEX 2

Survey questionnaire for parents

1. How often does your child use the following media: computers, tablets, smartphones?

2. What types of media does your child prefer?

3. Have you noticed an improvement in your child›s social interaction since he/she started using media?

4. How often does your child interact with others through media?

5. Do you think media literacy has a positive impact on your child›s learning and development?

6. Do you think your child is receiving enough support and training in using media?

7. How satisfied are you with the way your child uses media in learning and development?

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Marija Davchevska is a special educator and teacher-mentor who has participated in more than sixty seminars, congresses, symposiums, and conferences in the country and abroad in the field of special education, inclusive education, and supporting schools to create an inclusive learning environment. She is the author of more than 30 papers in domestic and foreign periodicals in the field of special and inclusive education. She has experience in implementing development projects in the field of inclusion, social inclusion, and discrimination, as well as organizing and preparing workshops, training, and events for teaching, professional and support staff, students, and professional services from primary and secondary schools in the field of inclusion and inclusion in society. , as well as experience in working with representatives of the civil sector. She is also the winner of the recognition „November 9" of the city of Veles in 2022 for special engagement and contribution to the advancement of educational activity for students with disabilities.