ARGUMENTS FOR THE AUTONOMY OF MEDIA LITERACY AS A MANDATORY SUBJECT IN MACEDONIAN SCHOOLS

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Abstract:

Media literacy is integrated as a teaching content in the Macedonian language subject in primary school, but its implementation is lagging behind in secondary education because of the curricula of primary and secondary schools in the country that have not been in a homogeneous relationship for years. In recent years, efforts have been made for media literacy to take part in everyday school experience through external project, or with media clubs' formation within the schools. But the effect that is achieved is far from the desired one (only few students among the school are getting real knowledge about the topic). In order to make better progress for the students and for them to understand the need and essence of this knowledge and skill, it should be elevated to a separate subject, which will be taught by skilled teachers. Unfortunately, teachers of Macedonian language and literature, without proper additional preparation are not sufficiently informed in Media literacy (not to the level of teaching the topic). Therefore, this case study aims to show the need for such an autonomous subject in schools, whereby Media Literacy will finally enhance its necessary place in education, and our young people will gain the necessary knowledge for functional life in the 21st century. For this purpose, in addition to theoretical research, empirical research will be conducted by surveying teaching staff and students and it will focus to provide the importance of such subject.

Key words: media literacy, primary school, mandatory subject, innovation

1. Introduction

October 31, 1938 remains remembered in history as a day of mass panic in the USA, when millions of Americans listened to Orson Welles' radio drama The War of the Worlds. According to the narration, broadcast in the form of a breaking news radio bulletin, an authoritative journalist explained in detail how the Earth was being attacked by Martians. Many listeners did not realize that it was a fictional and artistic depiction of an invasion, but believed they were witnessing a real event. In just a few minutes, the streets of some American cities were filled with people leaving their homes, hospitals admitted individuals with panic attacks, and police lines were flooded with calls—in which, as Hadley Cantril observed, "they did not ask whether the news was true, but simply how to escape." (Cantril 2025, 7) In 1939 panic was born from a radio broadcast; today the same psychological mechanisms are activated via the internet, social networks, and mobile applications—only with much faster spread and stronger impact. This event illustrates that in the absence of critical thinking and the ability to assess the credibility of information, media can cause chaos—even when their primary goal is the creation of artistic content.

Eight and a half decades later, despite the technological advancement of media, warning labels for the type and purpose of content, as well as age restrictions, the danger of manipulation—often unintentional—remains the same, or becomes greater. Therefore, the issue of media literacy is not only current but necessary for the stability of democratic processes and the safety of the public. It is, in fact, an individual ability to access, evaluate, and create media content across different platforms, which influences the development of critical thinking and informed participation in society.

Efforts made at the local level on this issue are not uniform. Certainly, they start from education, then public events such as "Media Literacy Days," conferences, the publication of numerous scientific papers, manuals, brochures, and the like—but these efforts are not sufficient, given that the Republic of North Macedonia is still at the bottom of the Media Literacy Index in Europe for 2023 (M. Lessenski)—a position it has continuously occupied since 2018.

The scope of the problem is large and multilayered; it includes aspects of low systemic education, low trust, as well as weak media freedom. Nevertheless, this paper will focus only on the educational process and how it can help in the struggle to create a media-aware population. Today's integration of media literacy and culture as a topic of study is formally integrated into several subjects in primary education, such as Macedonian language as the mother tongue, then in the curricula of mother tongue subjects of communities, as well as the subjects Technical Education and Informatics and Civic Education—but the most significant and most systematic presence is precisely in Macedonian language instruction. Beginning with the 2025/2026 school year, media literacy will also be integrated into the subject Macedonian Language and Literature in

general secondary education (gymnasiums). Additionally, the Faculty of Philology—Skopje, and the Faculties of Education in Skopje and Bitola already offer elective courses in media literacy in programs for future teaching professionals.

In the period from 2018 to 2023, the integration of media literacy into teaching brought satisfactory progress—the greatest among the countries in the last cluster—but still insufficient for a transition into a higher category. This clearly indicates that the existing model is inadequate. To achieve a real leap forward, media literacy should become a separate subject taught by teachers with specialized training, with modern teaching resources provided and continuous institutional support and opportunities for further development. This will ensure systemic, practically oriented, and professionally delivered instruction, which will raise the level of media literacy nationwide.

2. From Media Chaos to Educational Cosmos

2.1. The Arche of the Problem: From Hesiod to the Index

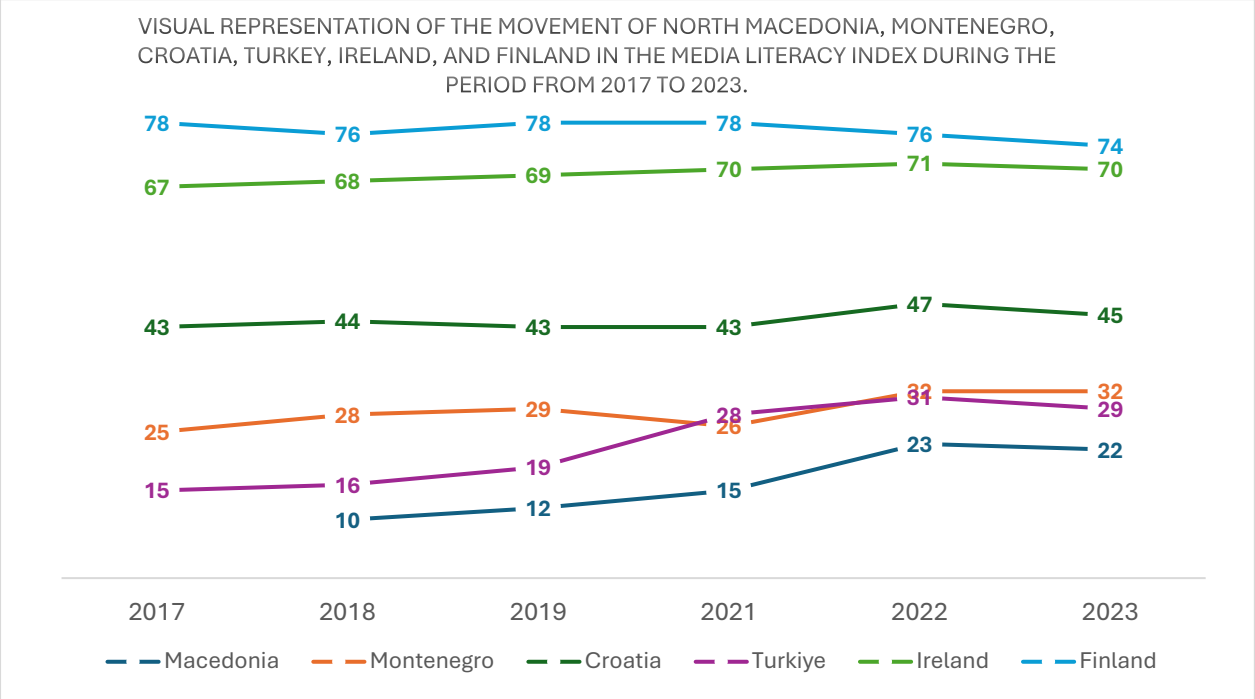
"In the beginning was Chaos," says Hesiod in his Theogony (Hesiod 2021, 8). In a symbolic sense, that chaos—an undefined abyss and primordial state before the creation of the cosmos—can be compared to the position of countries at the bottom of the Media Literacy Index. Here, education, the media environment, and trust in institutions are out of balance, and reforms are the attempt to establish cosmos: order, harmony, and stability.

It seems that all efforts are conditioned by or guided through the above-mentioned Index, produced by the Open Society Institute – Sofia (author M. Lessenski), which is a composite indicator combining data on media freedom, education, and the level of trust in institutions. Its rankings are not just abstract numbers, but a story about how capable a system is of transforming the initial state of chaos into a functional cosmos.

This dynamic is shown in Chart 1, which illustrates North Macedonia's movement in the Media Literacy Index from 2018 to 2023, compared with several countries with different development trajectories. Finland retains the top of the first cluster, Ireland records a stable transition into the highest category, and Croatia progresses from the third to the second cluster. Türkiye and Montenegro have significant shifts, but with different trends in stability. Macedonia, for its part, records a growth of 12 points in the analyzed period—the second fastest in the last cluster—but despite that, remains in the lowest category.

This disproportion between relative progress and absolute position underscores the need for systemic and long-term solutions.

The chart shows how countries move between stagnation and progress in creating media-resilient societies. It shows that North Macedonia is a step away from exiting the fifth cluster, while Sweden has a long stagnation. However, the difference is essential: in



Sweden, the standstill stems from having reached an already high level of educational and media infrastructure, where further growth requires innovations rather than the improvement of existing practices. In contrast, North Macedonia is still struggling to establish the basic prerequisites—institutional support, resources, and strategy—without which the exit from media chaos and the transition into a functional cosmos remain a challenge, not a reality.

To grasp the magnitude of the path, we must look at where Macedonia began its development.

1. First Steps (2017–2019): If we follow the journey through the numbers, we will see that North Macedonia's story in the Index does not begin with the first available data from 2017 (M. Lessenski), but in 2018 (M. Lessenski), when the country first entered the list—at the very bottom among 35 ranked countries, with 10 points, and above it was Türkiye with 16 points. The low points are not accidental, especially given the conclusion of a 2016 study conducted by the School of Journalism and Public Relations, which stated: "In the Republic of Macedonia, media literacy is an almost unknown category and very little has been done so far for its promotion and implementation" (Shopar, Ḱupeva, and Temenugova 2016, 9). On the other hand, the same report emphasizes that

in the sphere of education, nowhere, in any document—law, strategy, or development program—is media literacy mentioned as a key component. This situation represents media chaos, in which the basic mechanisms for critical information and professional reporting are degraded, leaving the public without a firm foundation for developing a media-resilient society.

One significant stride in this period is the attempt to implement media literacy in primary education from 2018 via the Slovenian combined model of media education, with updated teaching content in multiple subjects, such as the mother tongue, Civic Education, and others. The public became increasingly familiar with the term, and events and campaigns encouraged awareness of critical reception of media content. This resulted in a modest step in the Media Literacy Index in 2019 when there was a minimal improvement of two points, but the position remained unchanged.

It is important to note that it took nearly three years for these changes to be implemented in practice, with the adoption of the Concept for Primary Education and the new curricula for first and third grade from 2021, when for the first time the term "media literacy" came to life in school classrooms.

2. From Infodemic to Stagnation (2021–2025): The post-COVID report from 2021—"Double Trouble: Resilience to Fake News at the Time of Covid-19 Infodemic" (M. Lessenski)—notes an increase in the overall score to 15 points, but with no improvement in placement. Macedonia remains at the bottom, together with Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

This period is particularly significant from an educational perspective, because precisely in 2021 larger reforms in primary school curricula began, integrating media literacy into several subjects, training teaching staff, and preparing manuals with functional activities for teaching purposes.

The country recorded its greatest point increase in 2022 (M. Lessenski), when it rose to 40th place out of a total of 41 countries, with 23 points. This increase was not enough to exit the fifth cluster. The role of changes in education is obvious, as in this period activities on the ground intensified in scope—workshops for students, projects from governmental and non-governmental organizations—with the aim of encouraging critical media thinking already in the classroom. A strong attempt was also made to form Media Clubs in several schools, with trained teachers who continuously collaborate with experienced journalists to foster a "journalistic spirit" among students.

The situation appears seemingly even better in the latest 2023 report (M. Lessenski), when Macedonia climbed one place higher—to 39th position—but this shift was more a consequence of declines in other countries' results than of stable domestic progress.

The main reason is that introducing media literacy in primary education as an integrated area across several subjects did not bring the expected result. This approach—although conceptually advanced—faced, in practice, insufficient methodological support, limited teacher training, and a lack of systemic evaluation. The shortcoming is partially compensated by the introduction of new accredited programs in higher education institutions that prepare teaching staff, with a special emphasis on the Faculties of Education in Skopje and Bitola, as well as the Faculty of Philology in Skopje, in order to strengthen media literacy competencies already during their studies. However, there is also a lack of a national plan for systematic professional development of already active teachers, through which they would acquire or upgrade skills for integrating media literacy into teaching, via trainings, mentoring support, or practical tools.

The effect of all educational interventions on the broader media climate is still limited, which becomes visible in the current period. Although a report on the state of the Media Literacy Index for 2024 is not available, it can be noted that in 2025, according to the World Press Freedom Index (Reporters Without Borders 2025), the country recorded a decline from 35th place last year to 42nd place. Disinformation remains widespread, and the lack of professionalism further erodes trust, maintaining a state of chronic media chaos.

These fluctuating results do not stem solely from the educational system, but from a broader social and institutional climate. Although recent years have seen increased institutional activity, deeply rooted problems remain: a poor media market, low ethical standards, weak development of media literacy, and media dependence on state funding, which creates room for influence and clientelism.

Hence, even though the foundations for a cosmos—i.e., a harmonized system of knowledge and skills for critical media thinking—are being laid in the educational segment, the general media environment remains unstable and filled with chaotic influences, which makes the complete transition from chaos to a sustainable cosmos difficult rather than real.

3. Chaos as a Constant

3.1. Nailed to the Bottom

The data reveal a consistent problem: for almost a decade the country's position has remained nailed to the bottom, with small and insufficient fluctuations. When educational and media policies are based on chaotic impulses without a clear strategy, the result is not harmony but prolonged chaos.

This standstill is particularly visible among the young population. According to data from "Survey Report on News Consumption, Recognition of Disinformation and Civic

Engagement among Young People in North Macedonia" (Prof. Dr. Marijana Marković et al. 2024, 9–16), only 32.7% of them check whether sources and links from information are functional, while as many as 63.7% passively receive all information through social networks. This indicates high susceptibility to manipulation through "algorithmic" news intake without research, verification, or analysis.

3.2. Philosophy of Media Transformation

Psychology and philosophy recognize four dynamics that shape the universe: harmony—the balance toward which systems and individuals strive; chaos—disruption of that balance; power—the instruments for steering society, but also the individual; and, finally, order or cosmos—successful organization. If the initial "media chaos" was the arche—the source of all possible changes—then our path toward the cosmos is still unfinished. For real progress, systematic, sustainable, and mutually interconnected reforms are needed, which will lead the country out of the abyss of the fifth cluster toward stability and harmony.

In that process, education plays the key role, because media literacy is inextricably linked to the quality and direction of educational policies. It is not enough merely to copy the Slovenian model or to insert the relevant terms into national documents, as has already been done. Systemic control, regular review of results, and adaptation of measures to real challenges are necessary. Without such a strategic approach, integrating critical thinking, media content analysis, and digital skills into curricula remains partial and without a measurable effect.

The experience of the highest-ranked countries in the index shows that, besides media freedom and trust in institutions, it is precisely consistent educational policies that treat media literacy as a core competence—on par with reading, writing, and mathematics—that enable the transition from chaos to cosmos. In the national context, the absence of such a system means that education fails to form the "critical mass" of citizens who will initiate lasting transformation.

An illustrative situation can explain this need: if a student learns that a sensationalist headline often contains words with strongly emotional meaning and shading—such as "incredible," "shocking," or "brilliant"—they will initially be cautious and recognize such attempts at manipulation. But if those headlines remain the dominant standard in the media environment, perception changes—from exception, they become the rule, and critical distance gradually disappears.

In other words, reforms in the media sphere and in education must develop synchronously—because one without the other is like trying to build a heavy stone house on straw foundations.

4. From Plan to Practice: Toward a Stable Model of Media Literacy

4.1. Normative and Conceptual Foundation

Reforms related to introducing media literacy into the educational system, as already noted, began most strongly in 2021 with the adoption of the new Concept for Primary Education. In order to strengthen the integration of media literacy, in 2023 the Bureau for Development of Education (BDE), in partnership with USAID, IREX, MIM, ICS, and MOF, issued the document Framework for Media Literacy in Primary Education (BDE 2023, 23), which states that media literacy competencies, as part of the National Standards for Primary Education, are included in curricula in various ways. Primarily, a topic dedicated to media literacy has been introduced in the subjects Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish, Serbian, and Bosnian languages, from first to ninth grade. Additionally, parts of media literacy are embedded in the content and assessment standards of other school subjects, as well as as a tool for implementing activities aimed at achieving certain standards in almost all subjects. The Framework also provides for the possibility of in-depth study through free elective subjects from fourth to ninth grade.

Although from a conceptual standpoint and at the time of adoption this is a logical and significant step, the framework still does not have sufficient practical effect to initiate essential transformation.

The formal presence of media literacy in Macedonian Language, Technical Education, Informatics, and Civic Education does not guarantee equal implementation. In Macedonian Language instruction for Grade VI, for example, media content often falls into third place due to the extensive program in grammar, literature, and expression and composition, which is too large for the planned annual fund of 144 hours. An additional problem is the insufficient preparedness of teaching staff: trainings are short (2–3 days), and although materials are available, their applicability is limited.

In other subjects the situation is even more constrained. In Technical Education and Informatics, media topics are reduced to “online safety” or “online living,” with only 4–6 hours per year. In Civic Education for Grade VII, media literacy is treated solely as a concept within the content “Personal Identity,” through a standard that reads: “explains the connection between social media identity and personal identity” (BDE 2024, 20). Therefore, it is not pessimistic to conclude that the fragmented allocation of about 25 hours of media literacy results in shallow and unstable progress.

A further problem arises from gradual implementation: at the time of writing this paper, two cohorts in primary school (VIII and IX grade) and three cohorts in secondary education (II, III, and IV year) will not be covered by the new teaching content at all. This creates a generational gap and limits the overall effectiveness of the reforms.

Although the 2023 Framework clearly sets the theoretical and methodological foundation, including the possibility of preparing programs for elective subjects in this area, actual implementation depends on the will of schools, teacher motivation, and allocation of class hours. This is confirmed by the fact that to date a program for such a subject has still not been approved and published on the official BDE site. Such dependence creates a risk of uneven and incomplete development: on the one hand, students who will have the good fortune to expand their media literacy, and on the other, students who will miss the opportunity and remain with a spontaneous or low level of competence.

This situation not only limits the effectiveness of reforms but also deepens existing inequality in access to quality education, preventing the creation of a generationally aligned level of media culture.

Whether this researcher's position—supported by a theoretical framework—will coincide with the real situation on the ground should be shown by the survey to be conducted among various stakeholders in the educational sphere.

4.2. The Voice of the Educational Community

1. Methodological Setup of the Survey: The survey was conducted among teachers, professors, and students in primary and secondary education, with the aim of checking on the ground the progress of reforms and assessing the effectiveness of activities carried out so far to improve media literacy, while testing the hypothesis that the implemented reforms have not resulted in the expected outcomes.

2. Target Group and Structure of Respondents: The research included a total of 147 respondents, of whom 91 were teaching staff and 56 students. The teachers were from primary and secondary education, with representation of different subject areas, to provide a broader picture of preparedness for introducing media literacy into teaching. The students were of different ages and educational profiles, to gain insight into their real abilities for critical reading and analysis of media content. The larger representation of teachers in the sample is a conscious choice, since their capacity and willingness to implement new content are a key prerequisite for the effectiveness of reforms.

3. Structure and Content of the Questionnaire: The questionnaire consisted of a combination of closed questions and practical tasks, structured into three thematic segments:

o Identification of visual manipulations—distinguishing a real photo from a photo generated by artificial intelligence;

o Recognizing the credibility of information—distinguishing a true from a false news item;

o Critical analysis of news headlines—distinguishing sensationalist from objective headlines.

Each segment was designed to enable measurement of respondents' practical skills, not only their theoretical knowledge of media literacy. This approach made it possible to identify specific weaknesses and strengths in the media education process, as well as to determine the degree of preparedness for applicable reforms.

4. Data Collection and Processing Procedure: The survey was conducted online, with voluntary and anonymous participation. Data were processed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. In this part of the text, we will devote attention only to mapping the key results, while the detailed results and the visual materials used are presented in Appendix 1.

o Recognizing the Reality of Photographs: The first set of questions concerned the ability of respondents to distinguish real photos from those created with artificial intelligence. The anticipated diversity in accuracy across different target groups proved correct, but, unfortunately, without a consistent positive trend. Strikingly, high-school students achieved the highest accuracy rate of 50%, even though for them media literacy is neither present as a subject nor as an integrated topic in the curriculum. Only 13.64% of respondents in this group had a formal teaching activity during their schooling, and the frequency of such activity was no more than once a year. This indicates that the acquired ability is due more to individual interest and frequent exposure to social network content than to systematic instructional support. This generation of students is characterized by skills in easily detecting the classic mistakes that artificial intelligence still makes: inconsistent shadows, distorted facial proportions, etc. However, their analytical eye often tends toward excessive skepticism, leading to the misidentification of real photographs as manipulated.

Students in VI and VII grades, who study media literacy as part of a systematized teaching program, achieved an accuracy rate of 45.56%, slightly lower than high-school students but higher than students in VIII and IX grades (37.72%). The trend shows that lower grades have higher precision, but—like other groups—are skeptical of the authenticity of real photographs.

Unfortunately, there is yet another problem. Only 53.33% of respondents stated that they had experience with similar activities at school, which means that even when curricula include content in which current and socially necessary activities for students and the development of their critical thinking can be carried out, this is not the case, and the development of such skills remains spontaneous.

Particularly significant is that the results confirm the conclusion that teaching staff must undergo systematic training and continuous upgrading. Professors showed the lowest accuracy rate (24.36%), regardless of teaching profile. Difficulties most often arise in perceiving subtle visual anomalies, such as improperly placed shadows, changes in texture, or an unreal atmosphere. Although class and subject teachers in individual items record minimally higher results, their overall accuracy remains low (31.05%); this marginal difference may be partly due to trainings implemented by the BDE, but it is obviously not sufficient.

In the pedagogical-methodical literature, although there is no unified threshold, it is accepted that a teacher must possess a high level of mastery of the teaching content—not only to transmit information, but also to adapt it to students' cognitive needs. Concepts like Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) and Content Knowledge for Teaching (CKT) indicate that a teacher should master the content at a level that allows transforming it into effective instruction, which implies depth, flexibility, and contextual understanding. The fact that students achieve higher accuracy in recognizing such photos suggests an inversion of the expected relationship and points to the need for strengthened and structured professional development programs.

All this leaves no room for doubt: formal instruction is beginning to show results, but they are insufficient. Serious investment is needed in the higher educational levels, and—more importantly—priority and substantive professional development of the teaching staff. Without that foundation, any attempt at reform is merely an architecture of illusion.

o True or False News: The situation is somewhat better when it comes to the degree of recognizing the truthfulness of news by headline. High-school students have 70.00% correct answers; they are followed by subject teachers with 61.96%, classroom teachers with 59.29%, and professors with 58.46% accuracy. The weakest performance is among students in VI and VII grades, with 49.33%. The problems all groups share boil down to not knowing the rules that a news item must not omit important information.

For example, all groups of respondents predominantly selected as true the news item: "Research shows that students who use TikTok more than 2 hours a day are more likely to believe in fake news." Although the headline sounds logical and statistically grounded, the problematic point is that respondents rated it as true without critically evaluating the source. The formulation "research shows" implies the existence of a scientific or institutional basis, but in the absence of specific data—such as institution, methodology, or time of implementation—the news does not meet the criteria for credibility. This indicates an underdeveloped ability to recognize manipulation through false authoritativeness, which is particularly important in the context of media literacy. An additional worrying fact is that teaching staff are those who lead in failing to recognize this danger in the headline. This not only confirms the need for systematic training, but

also indicates that intuitive judgment is often preferred over analytical judgment—even among those who have the professional responsibility to develop these skills in students.

o Sensationalism vs. Informativeness: The third block of questions was based on measuring respondents' ability to recognize sensationalism in certain headlines. Headlines were deliberately generated to be clear in their sensationalism, using words that give an emotional color to the text, with those words written in capital letters, often with exclamation points. The alarming situation is that the headline: "UNBELIEVABLE! Students caught using ChatGPT on a test!" was assessed as informative by 46.67% of students in VI and VII grades, who studied these rules within regular classes according to the Grade VI Macedonian Language curriculum. This result indicates an underdeveloped ability to recognize linguistic markers of sensationalism, which is especially concerning given that this group formally studies media literacy.

Instead of recognizing emotional manipulation, some students interpreted the content as objective information, which shows that the curriculum is not effective enough in developing critical reading of media texts.

However, there is room to consider that this phenomenon may also be due to the "naivety" characteristic of this age group, and not only to ignorance, since with respect to other headlines that are clearer in their message, they show a higher degree of recognizing sensationalism, with 83.33% accuracy, which—together with the success of classroom teachers—makes them the best in this set of questions.

It can be concluded that this is the strongest field of knowledge among respondents from the six groups, and precisely for that reason it should be used as a basis for further improvement of teaching practices.

Although the results show potential, they simultaneously indicate the need for systemic support, methodological precision, and continuous training of teaching staff.

5. Roadmap for Development

The survey results showed that although media literacy is recognized as an essential competence according to institutional commitments, its implementation in the educational system is still fragmented and insufficient.

The efforts so far toward formalization are targeted and quite extensive when it comes to drafting documents, laws and by-laws, and manuals, but efforts seem to falter when it comes to teacher training. The survey results identified limited capacities among teaching staff for transferring media skills, due to a lack of formal education during studies, short trainings, insufficient methodological support, and the absence of systemic evaluation.

The integrated model of media literacy across multiple subjects, according to experience to date, does not provide stable results. Students show potential for critical thinking, but results vary depending on age, not exposure to formal instruction. These insights indicate the need for a systemic approach that will overcome existing weaknesses and enable long-term and effective integration of media literacy into education.

Hence, several recommendations arise, based on extensive analysis but also the researcher's personal insight gained from everyday teaching practice:

5.1 Urgent impetus to develop programs for a free elective subject "Media Literacy." Instead of preparing a single program for one elective subject, it is necessary to develop separate elective subjects for each grade, with thematically diverse content aligned with the National Standards, but also with topics already included in compulsory subjects. This approach will enable continuity, gradual upgrading, and adaptation of content according to students' age and cognitive development.

5.2 Provide continuous institutional support through BDE, the Ministry of Education and Science (MES), and higher education institutions, thereby guaranteeing long-term and practically oriented trainings, with mentoring support and evaluation of acquired knowledge. One-off trainings on this topic do not guarantee success. While the basics of media and the messages they carry remain the same, the ways of transmission and forms of media content change daily. Therefore, teaching staff must receive regularly updated trainings and tools that follow technological changes and new disinformation tactics, so that instruction remains relevant and effective.

5.3 Make existing manuals and tools for integrating media literacy available in every school and to every teacher, but also listen to the voice of educators and continue creating manuals according to their needs. Such materials should be practically applicable, easily adaptable to different student capacities and education levels, and regularly updated to track new media trends and challenges.

5.4 Encourage teacher involvement in creating teaching materials. This approach, especially if implemented with institutional support, will ensure increased motivation and ownership of the process, as well as experiential learning, which is currently lacking. At the same time, it will overcome the problem of limited exercises in textbooks. According to the guidelines and concept of education, teachers today have the opportunity to create their own content and, even without consulting the MES or BDE, can completely replace the exercises proposed in the textbooks, as long as they adhere to achieving the prescribed assessment standards. However, such undertakings require resources that schools and teachers cannot provide, which limits teacher effectiveness and creativity. Attempts to offer such exercises through digital versions of textbooks are currently limited and not very functional precisely because the circle of professionals working on them has not been expanded nationwide.

5.5 Encourage wider formation of media clubs in schools, which will increase the practical application of media literacy. Such an endeavor existed as part of the efforts that the Macedonian Institute for Media carries out on the ground. The activity was part of USAID's media literacy project called "Young People Reflect," and in the last two school years (2023/2024 and 2024/2025) numerous media clubs were formed in primary and secondary schools. If the trend and support for establishing such clubs continue, students and teachers will continuously receive the necessary support for successful implementation of media literacy and quality acquisition of key knowledge.

5.6 Conduct regular evaluations of students' achievements through testing of critical thinking and media analysis, with standardized instruments and clearly defined criteria. These tests should be carried out periodically, but not on target groups; rather, they should constitute comprehensive testing. It should not affect students' grades and success, but should help provide feedback to teachers and institutions on the effectiveness of teaching approaches, as well as on needs for additional training or adjustment of teaching content.

5.7 Media literacy should become an autonomous, mandatory subject in primary and secondary education, with one or two classes per week, thereby ensuring the perception of its importance among students and teachers. Today, such a subject as autonomous and mandatory does not exist in any country in the world, but its necessity is not the same in every society.

Considering the slow development of the country in this area, there is a real need for such a subject to become mandatory in our educational system. Instead of following the Slovenian model, which implements topics in a fragmented way across multiple subjects, we can be pioneers in making it independent as a separate teaching unit.

In more recent history, other subjects have followed a similar developmental path. Information Technology, which was initially represented only through elective content, over time became a compulsory subject as a response to the increasing digitalization of society. Civic Education was introduced to strengthen democratic culture, awareness of human rights, and active civic participation. These examples show that social and technological changes often dictate the emergence of new, autonomous subjects—a trend that media literacy should follow as well.

This recommendation is placed last, even though the title of this study arises from it, because its implementation requires time and a systemic solution—preparing teaching staff with appropriate education and drafting a clear normative framework for it, as well as analytical preparation of such a subject that will gradationally correspond to the needs of modern society, but above all to students' cognitive abilities.

It seems that this is one of the ways for integration to abandon the chaotic model and begin generating the essential benefits envisaged by the Framework for Media Literacy

in Primary Education (2023). Thus, the educational system will move from the initial chaos toward a stable cosmos—order, harmony, and functionality in the development of media literacy.

6. Future Directions for Continuing the Research

The research opened a new doubt—are teaching staff capable of preparing young people for the world that awaits them? The answer to this question contains research that is not based solely on media literacy, but on a broader spectrum of skills that a student should acquire in order to become an independent, critically oriented, and socially responsible individual.

This opens the need for an in-depth re-examination of the role and structure of the Macedonian educational system—not only as a place where information is transmitted, but as a process of forming awareness, values, and the ability to orient oneself in a reality that is transforming with unprecedented speed and complexity.

As for media literacy as a compulsory and autonomous subject, future research should be directed toward:

1. Long-term monitoring of the effects of the proposed measures for integrating media literacy, through repeated administration of the survey and trend analysis over a period of at least 3 years.

2. Expanding the sample with a larger number of schools and including additional categories of respondents, such as parents and policy makers, to obtain a broader perspective.

3. Comparative analysis with countries that have different integration models, in order to identify applicable best practices.

4. Pilot programs in selected schools for testing new teaching content and methods, with a focus on adaptation according to age and cognitive development of students.

5. Qualitative research through interviews and focus groups with teachers and students, for a deeper understanding of practical challenges and opportunities in teaching application.

Such directions would enable not only confirmation and upgrading of current insights, but also building a more stable foundation for long-term educational policies in the field of media literacy.

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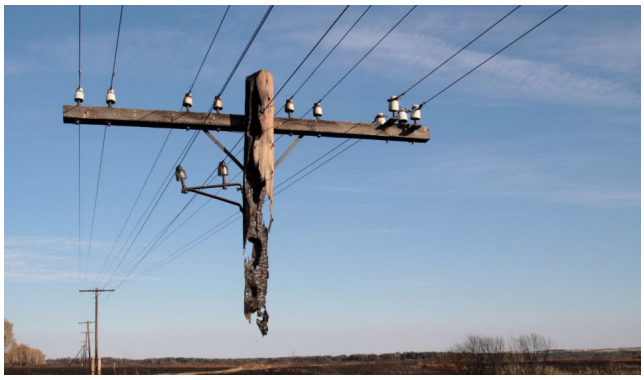
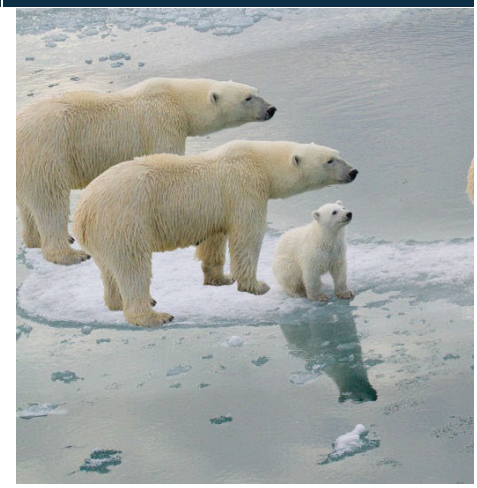
Прилози

PHOTO 1:	PHOTO 2:
	

Target group	Real photo (correct response)	AI photo	Cannot tell	Real photo (correct response)	AI photo	Cannot tell
Student from VI or VII class	20.00%	73.33%	6.67%	20.00%	73.33%	6.67%
Student from VIII or IX class	21.05%	73.68%	5.26%	10.53%	84.21%	5.26%
High school student	22.73%	68.18%	9.09%	59.09%	36.36%	4.55%
Class teacher	21.43%	64.29%	14.29%	35.71%	50.00%	14.29%
Course teacher	21.57%	74.51%	3.92%	17.65%	80.39%	1.96%
High school professor	15.38%	69.23%	15.38%	30.77%	65.38%	3.85%
Percentage of accurate responses:	20.36%	70.54%	9.10%	28.96%	64.95%	6.09%

PHOTO 3:	PHOTO 4:
	

The photograph is real, but edited. A photo edited with AI is considered the correct response.

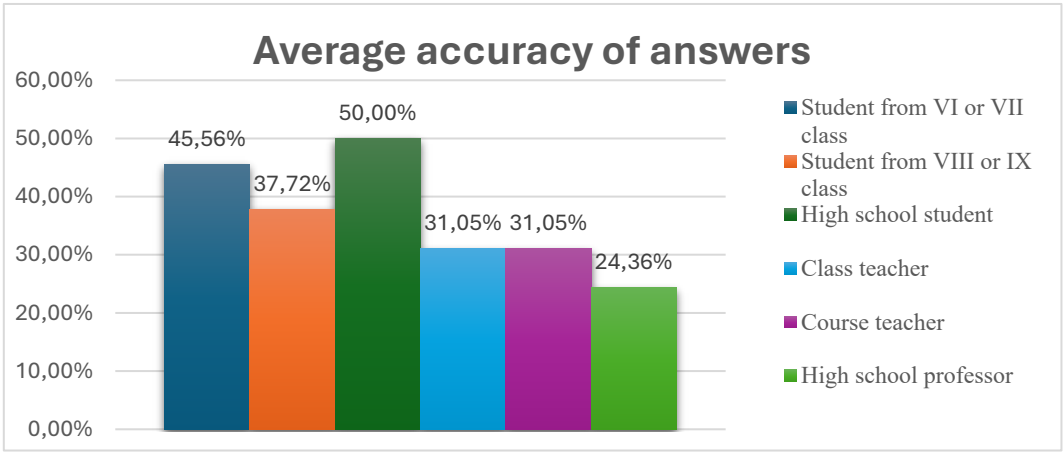
Target group	Real photo (correct response)	AI photo	Cannot tell	Real photo (correct response)	AI photo	Cannot tell
Student from VI or VII class	26.67%	53.33%	20.00%	33.33%	66.67%	0.00%
Student from VIII or IX class	5.26%	89.47%	5.26%	36.84%	57.89%	5.26%
High school student	27.27%	63.64%	9.09%	63.64%	31.82%	4.55%
Class teacher	0.00%	85.71%	14.29%	57.14%	35.71%	7.14%
Course teacher	7.84%	86.27%	5.88%	52.94%	47.06%	0.00%
High school professor	19.23%	69.23%	11.54%	50.00%	34.62%	15.38%
Percentage of accurate responses:	14.38%	74.61%	11.01%	48.98%	45.63%	5.39%

PHOTO 5:				PHOTO 6:		
						
Target group	**Real photo (correct response)**	**AI photo**	**Cannot tell**	**Real photo (correct response)**	**AI photo**	**Cannot tell**
Student from VI or VII class	20.00%	80.00%	0.00%	33.33%	60.00%	6.67%
Student from VIII or IX class	5.26%	89.47%	5.26%	52.63%	42.11%	5.26%
High school student	0.00%	95.45%	4.55%	36.36%	63.64%	0.00%
Class teacher	28.57%	57.14%	14.29%	50.00%	28.57%	21.43%
Course teacher	17.65%	70.59%	11.76%	72.55%	21.57%	5.88%
High school professor	30.77%	46.15%	23.08%	80.77%	0.00%	19.23%
Percentage of accurate responses:	17.04%	73.14%	9.82%	54.27%	35.98%	9.75%

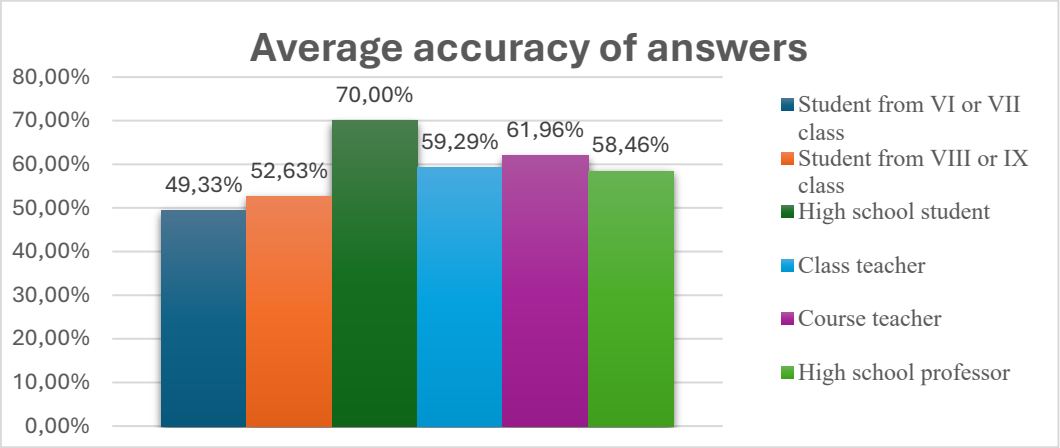
Have you had similar activities to this one within your education?	Yes	No	Don't remember
Student from VI or VII class	53.33%	40.00%	6.67%
Student from VIII or IX class	63.16%	21.05%	15.79%
High school student	13.64%	59.09%	27.27%

Have you ever organized similar activities for your students, related to recognizing false photographs?	Yes	No	Don't remember
Class teacher	57.14%	35.71%	7.14%
Course teacher	45.10%	50.98%	3.92%
High school professor	34.62%	61.54%	3.85%

How often are these activities organized?	Weekly	Monthly	Once a year	A few times a year (less than five)
Student from VI or VII class	25.00%	0.00%	12.50%	62.50%
Student from VIII or IX class	16.67%	33.33%	25.00%	25.00%
High school student	0.00%	33.33%	33.33%	33.33%
Class teacher	12.50%	37.50%	12.50%	37.50%
Course teacher	13.04%	21.74%	13.04%	52.17%
High school professor	0.00%	11.11%	44.44%	44.44%



Set of questions 2



Individual results:

Titles:	NEWS 1: Elementary school in Bitola will introduce extracurricular activities to deal with fake news			NEWS 2: The government announced that a state service will be established to control all information published on social networks		
Target group	**Reliable news**	**Unreliable newsвест**	**I can't tell**	**Reliable news**	**Unreliable news**	**I can't tell**
Student from VI or VII class	66.67 %	20.00%	13.33 %	93.33%	6.67%	0.00 %
Student from VIII or IX class	52.63 %	15.79%	31.58 %	31.58%	52.63%	15.79 %
High school student	72.73 %	27.27%	0.00 %	27.27%	72.73%	0.00 %
Class teacher	71.43 %	14.29%	14.29 %	35.71%	50.00%	14.29 %
Course teacher	52.94 %	41.18%	5.88 %	31.37%	60.78%	7.84 %
High school professor	53.85 %	30.77%	15.38 %	38.46%	57.69%	3.85 %

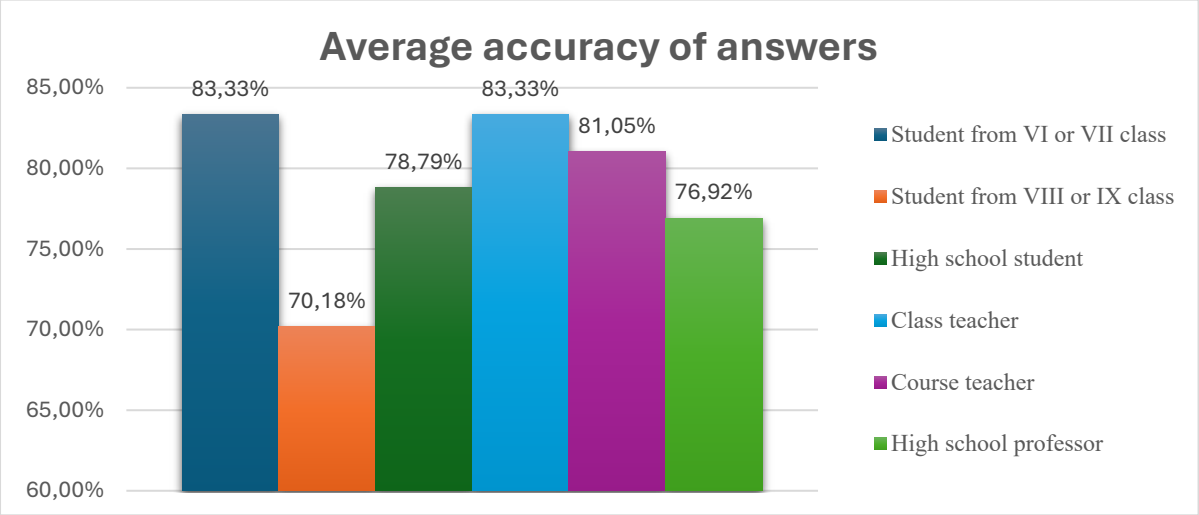
Titles:	NEWS 3: A well-known online store is offering free phones to students who participate in surveys			NEWS 4: Research shows that students who use TikTok for more than 2 hours a day are more likely to believe fake news		
Target group	**Reliable news**	**Unreliable news**	**I can't tell**	**Reliable news**	**Unreliable news**	**I can't tell**
Student from VI or VII class	66.67 %	20.00%	13.33 %	93.33%	6.67%	0.00 %
Student from VIII or IX class	52.63 %	15.79%	31.58 %	31.58%	52.63%	15.79 %
High school student	72.73 %	27.27%	0.00 %	27.27%	72.73%	0.00 %
Class teacher	71.43 %	14.29%	14.29 %	35.71%	50.00%	14.29 %
Course teacher	52.94 %	41.18%	5.88 %	31.37%	60.78%	7.84 %
High school professor	53.85 %	30.77%	15.38 %	38.46%	57.69%	3.85 %

Titles:	NEWS 5: A group has been discovered in Skopje that created fake news using ChatGPT to get clicks		
Target group	**Reliable news**	Target group	**Reliable news**
Student from VI or VII class	66.67%	Student from VI or VII class	66.67%
Student from VIII or IX class	68.42%	Student from VIII or IX class	68.42%
High school student	68.18%	High school student	68.18%
Class teacher	71.43%	Class teacher	71.43%
Course teacher	74.51%	Course teacher	74.51%
High school professor	73.08%	High school professor	73.08%

Question Set 3: Sensationalistic and informative headlines

Titles:	SCANDAL AT SCHOOL: Teacher took all students' phones!			**UNBELIEVABLE! Students caught using ChatGPT on a test!**		
Target group	**Informative headline**	**Sensationalist headline**	**Can't tell**	**Informative headline**	**Sensationalist headline**	**Can't tell**
Student from VI or VII class	33.33%	Student from VI or VII class	33.33%	46.67%	53.33%	0.00%
Student from VIII or IX class	26.32%	Student from VIII or IX class	26.32%	47.37%	47.37%	5.26%
High school student	27.27%	High school student	27.27%	18.18%	81.82%	0.00%
Class teacher	14.29%	Class teacher	14.29%	7.14%	78.57%	14.29%
Course teacher	23.53%	Course teacher	23.53%	21.57%	74.51%	3.92%
High school professor	30.77%	High school professor	30.77%	26.92%	73.08%	0.00%

Headlines:	**Teachers discuss the use of artificial intelligence in teaching**		
Target	**Informative headline**	**Sensationalist headline**	**Can't tell**
Student from VI or VII class	86.67%	13.33%	0.00%
Student from VIII or IX class	89.47%	10.53%	0.00%
High school student	86.36%	13.64%	0.00%
Class teacher	92.86%	0.00%	7.14%
Course teacher	92.16%	5.88%	1.96%
High school professor	88.46%	11.54%	0.00%


Average accuracy of answers
85,00%
80,00%
75,00%
70,00%
65,00%
60,00%
83,33%
70,18%
78,79%
83,33%
81,05%
76,92%
Student from VI or VII class
Student from VIII or IX class
High school student
Class teacher
Course teacher
High school professor

About the author

Aleksandra Spasevska is a professor of Macedonian language and literature and holds a master's degree in Macedonian literature. Her research interests focus on literature, media and digital literacy, as well as critical thinking in education. She actively participates in scientific and educational projects and is involved in youth and civic initiatives, promoting the role of education and activism in contemporary society.