

# **Media Literacy Education in the Balkan Countries: the Greece and Turkey**

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**Abstract**

The mass communication process via (mass) media has a great potential of reaching people all around the world. This may foster cosmopolitanism and democracy, but it also holds the danger of an increasing manipulation because of the fact that media can never be neutral and value-free. While some studies do not see a harmful impact of media, most come to the conclusion, that media can have a negative influence on children's actions and views. Media literacy education can be an alternative to these ways of censorship and represents an effective approach to widely shared concerns about the mass media's influence on people. In this study, formal education systems in Greece and Turkey are compared and contrasted in terms of media literacy education. At the end of the study, it was understood that media literacy education in both countries has not found its way in the curriculum of primary and secondary education as it is recommended by some initiatives such as UNESCO, European Council etc.

**Key words:** Media Literacy Education, Primary and Secondary Education, Greece, Turkey

## **Introduction**

The objective of the European Union (EU) is to become the world's most advanced information society by the year 2010. The rapid development of digital technologies has thus made more urgent an issue that has been pressing for some time: the need for European citizens to fully understand the means by which information, ideas and opinions are now created, circulated and shared in modern societies: in other words, for a media literate population. "Today, media literacy is as central to active and full citizenship as literacy was at the beginning of 19th century"<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Provided by Information Society and Media Commissioner Viviane Reding.

The most basic definition of media literacy is provided by OFCOM, which states that media literacy consists of the ability to access, understand and create communications in a variety of contexts<sup>2</sup>. It includes the command of previous forms of literacy: reading and writing (from understanding to creative skills), audiovisual, digital and the new skills required in a climate of media convergence—that is the merging of electronic media (mass communication) and digital media (multimedia communication) which occurs in the advanced stages of development of information society. Media literacy is complemented with a series of broader considerations<sup>3</sup>: (1) The concept of media (with its corresponding messages and languages) refers to all those that form part of daily life and incorporate contemporary culture, independently of their specific nature (image, sound, written word...) (2) The skills related to media literacy can be summarised in four areas of ability: access, analysis, evaluation and creative production. (3) All of these skills boost aspects of personal development: consciousness, critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. (4) Media literacy is a necessary part of active citizenship and is the key to the full development of freedom of expression and the right to information. It is therefore an essential part of participative democracy and intercultural dialogue. As it is concluded from these considerations, the fundamental of media literacy is critical autonomy in relationship to all media.

Media literacy consists of three dimensions (Livingstone & Thumim, 2003):

- Technical competencies: This means that one has to have access to different sorts of media and the ability to use media as a prerequisite for the other two dimensions.

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Retrieved from <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/06/1326&f>

**2 OFCOM** (Office of Communications)

Retrieved from [http://www.ofcom.org.uk/advice/media\\_literacy/of\\_med\\_lit/whatis/](http://www.ofcom.org.uk/advice/media_literacy/of_med_lit/whatis/)

**3** “Current trends and approaches to media literacy in Europe”. This study, carried out for the European Commission by the universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB) in the second half of 2007, is aimed at mapping current practices in implementing media literacy in Europe. It covers the 27 EU Member States and the EEA Member States. Retrieved from <http://www.eavi.eu/images/stories/reports/executive%20summary.pdf>

- Critical reception practices: This dimension consists of critical thinking skills. Students will develop an understanding of how media work. Rather than being passive consumers of media, students learn that realities are constructed to reflect ideas or values, to sell a product or to produce excitement. Students also learn how to spot a stereotype and to distinguish facts from opinions.
- Content production: A third aspect of media literacy is the ability to produce and distribute content of media. Students cannot only use media but actively create media messages.

Media education and Media literacy has been described and defined in an international context by UNESCO, in an initiative that began in 1982 with the conference in Grunwald and continued with conferences in Toulouse in 1990 and Vienna in 1999. Finally, the fourth, the UNESCO seminar in Seville in 2002 highlighted the need for action through active promotion policies in five areas: 1) Investigation; 2) Training; 3) Cooperation between schools, the media, NGOs, private businesses and public institutions; 4) Consolidation and promotion of the public sphere of society and its relationship with the media<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, media literacy is considered to be a very important factor for citizenship in today's information society. It is a life-long skill not only for young generations but also for adults and elderly people, parents, teachers, media professionals. Formal media education plays a vital role in the process of media literacy formation although also informal learning areas will help the life-long learner to become a media literate person. Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 recommends that Member States develop the provision of key competences for all as part of their lifelong learning strategies, including their strategies for

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<sup>4</sup> Sevilla Seminar Cf. retrieved from [http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/files/5680/10346121330Seville\\_Recommendations.rtf/Seville+Recommendations.rtf](http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/files/5680/10346121330Seville_Recommendations.rtf/Seville+Recommendations.rtf).

achieving universal literacy<sup>5</sup>. In the Audiovisual Media Services Directive – recital 25a and article 26, it is stated that “Media-literate people will be better able to protect themselves and their families from harmful or offensive material. Therefore development of media literacy in all sections of society should be promoted and monitored.” (Media literacy profile, 2007, p.4). The picture shows that there are different practices and different levels of media literacy throughout Europe. It would be, therefore, extremely important to be able to analyse, highlight and spread good practices in the field throughout the EU.

This study concentrates on media literacy education in the formal education system in Greece and Turkey, this does not mean, however, that informal learning situations are seen as less relevant. The structures for implementation of media education in schools differ from one country to the next in the different EU member states (both existing and accession states) (Koller et.al., 2005). That’s why it is not possible to mention a standardized curriculum for Media Literacy in European countries. However, considering related literature we can conclude some common principles for a media literacy education compatible with EU objectives. Following you may find some basic principles in media literacy education and the case in Greece and Turkey in the scope of these principles.

1. Media education should be an entitlement, not a luxury. Therefore, comprehensive media education programs should be initiated and supported from pre-school to university level, and in adult education (Kerr, 2004). In primary or secondary education, it should be approached in both a cross-curricular and a subject-specific way integrated across the curriculum, not just in Mother tongue education or Media Studies (Lemmen, 2005; Feilitzen, 2004).

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<sup>5</sup> AVMSD Non binding working document rev.3. p. 8 retrieved from [http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/docs/reg/modernisation/proposal\\_2005/avmsd\\_cons\\_amend\\_0307\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/docs/reg/modernisation/proposal_2005/avmsd_cons_amend_0307_en.pdf) at

In addition to the fact that media literacy is an interdisciplinary subject and therefore is not limited to certain classes or age groups, it is undeniably a key skill and core literacy. In spite of the fact that comprehensive media education programs should be initiated and supported from pre-school to university level, in both countries media education is limited to junior high school. In that perspective, media education is not yet part of the curriculum in Greece and in Turkey. In Greece there is not a discrete subject for media literacy education, in Turkey media literacy education is a one-year elective course in secondary schools. In Greece, both in primary and lower secondary schools some core skills and learning outcomes are stated in The Studies of Environment and in Citizenship Education in primary schools such as, “Students will develop a critical attitude towards mass media” (Environmental studies, Second Grade) and “be able to adopt a critical attitude towards traditional media (television, radio, the press); to come in contact with new information and communication technologies (ICT) (the web, cable television, etc); to consider their effects on human life (Citizenship Education, Fourth Grade). In Turkey, both in primary and secondary schools some core skills and learning outcomes are mentioned in Social Science education and Mother-tongue education. In these courses core skills and learning outcomes are mostly based on being able to use Information technologies effectively. There are also few learning outcomes based on being aware of the media and criticizing media messages. For example “Students will be aware of how his ideas be manipulated through advertisements” (Social Science Education, Third Grade) and “Students will be able to think critically news, information and comments shared through mass media (newspapers, magazines, television etc.)” (Mother-tongue education, Second Grade)<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> For this analysis, the curriculum of all courses in the primary and secondary education of both countries were scanned. The National school curriculum of Greece is retrieved from <http://www.pi-schools.gr/download/programs/depps/english/19th.pdf>; the National school Curriculum of Turkey is retrieved from <http://ttkb.meb.gov.tr/>

In Greek national curriculum, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is a course in primary and junior high school which aims to provide pupils with opportunities to develop basic computer literacy as well as critical thinking skills and to enhance their motivation for creative action at a personal and social level. In that course most of the learning outcomes are based on being familiar with computer technology; some of them are based on reflecting critically on the impact of ICT on their own and others' lives and use of new technologies and being aware of the impact of ICT on science, art, culture, language, the environment, the quality of life. Similarly, Information and Communication Technology is a course in junior high school in Turkish national curriculum which aims to provide pupils with opportunities to develop basic computer literacy skills but not think critically about those skills.

2. Media Literacy Education is to teach not only 'through' but also 'about' the media (Duncan, 2001; Medialit, 2003). Media literacy education should include print, film, television, radio, multimedia, the Internet and digital games. It should adopt a competency/skills based approach focused on doing and not just knowing. In other words, media literacy should include media production (Medialit, 2003). Specialist courses such as Media Studies, Film Studies and Moving Image Arts should be available to all young people who want them (Kerr, 2004).

As the content of media literacy in Turkey, the studies for television, radio, press and internet are concerned. Those topics are not competency based approach focused on doing but just knowing. In other words, media literacy education does not include media production but mostly understanding media tools and symbols. Neither a unit nor a single learning outcome about film studies, multimedia and digital games are stated in the national curriculum of

Greece and Turkey. In addition, specialist courses such as Media Studies, Film Studies and Moving Image Arts are not available in primary or secondary level but possible at higher education for students who want to be media professionals.

3. Media ‘bashing’ is not media literacy; however media literacy sometimes involves criticizing the media. It does not mean “don't watch;” it means “watch carefully, think critically”. Looking at a media message or experience from just one perspective is not media literacy because media should be examined from multiple positions (Medialit, 2003).

In the national curriculum of Greece and Turkey general tendency is to convey the messages about media but not to create media messages. For example, in Greece, the learning outcome (Studies of Environment, First Grade) “Determine basic media. Investigate their TV-watching habits (time- duration, types and quality of broadcasting – pro-grams of preference)” is not for developing students’ critical thinking skills for media. There are also some learning outcomes based on developing critical thinking skills such as “think critically when using old and new technology media (TV, radio, press, internet, etc)” (Studies of the environment, Fourth Grade) but how it is done is not specified in the curriculum. In Turkey, almost all of the learning outcomes are related to understanding issues about various types of media tools in the courses apart from elective media literacy course. In media literacy course there are some learning outcomes based on developing students’ critical thinking skills such as “Students will recognize the positive sides of the internet as well as negative sides and practice in his own life”, but it is difficult to evaluate if this learning outcome is acquired or not; because to practice something in life is a life-long process and it does not happen right after the course is completed and also it is difficult for teachers to observe that change.



4. Media literacy policy and strategies should apply 3 P's at national level: Protection, Provision and Participation (Council of Europe, 2006). In other words, media education should not only be approached from a protectionist point of view since there might be problematic media consumption (Duncan, 2001). Media literacy curriculum guidelines should be established (nationally or regionally) by appropriate educational authorities. Besides, media education will be most effective when parents, teachers, media personnel and decision-makers all acknowledge they have a role to play in developing greater critical awareness among listeners, viewers and readers (Duncan, 2001).

Topics covered in Media Literacy Education are the principles of (mass) communication, media, family children and television, radio, print media and internet but not digital games, multimedia and the history of media. Most of the learning outcomes are based on making students be aware of negative sides of media and provide students with attitude and knowledge about communication technologies. In other words, media literacy policy applies protection and understanding issues as the main strategy at national level both in Greece and in Turkey. The greater integration of educational and communications systems would undoubtedly be an important step toward more effective education. However, in both countries a national committee decides on the principles for media literacy curriculum. In Greece, for example, media education doesn't exist for the supervisory school authorities and it isn't practicable for teachers because of not been supported either any freedoms or equipment (Erjavec, 2002). In Turkey, Media literacy curriculum is determined by Radio Television Supreme Court (RTUK) and National Ministry of Education. One can access conclusions about public consultation on media literacy in Greece in a report prepared by UNESCO, but there is no report prepared for Turkey or by Turkey on that issue.

5. Media literacy curriculum should take into account 5 C's or core competences: Comprehension, Critical thinking, Creativity, Cross-cultural communication and Citizenship (Council of Europe, 2006). Media literacy curriculum details should take into account teaching strategies: Textual readings and analysis, Simulations and role playing, Productions and representations. It should be output-oriented, project-oriented, attitudes promoted and values promoted (self-esteem, tolerance, democratic awareness,...). (Duncan, 2001)

When media literacy related learning outcomes are analyzed in the national curriculum of Greece, one can state that they are mostly based on comprehension, sometimes critical thinking, and hardly ever creativity such as creating a multimedia but never cross-cultural communication and citizenship. It is almost the same in Turkish curriculum apart from some learning outcomes in media literacy education curriculum which aim at developing creativity such as "to prepare his own newspaper" in elective Media Literacy Curriculum. Although some activities about textual reading and analysis and also simulations and role playing are maintained in the Turkish curriculum, it is difficult to say the curriculum is output-oriented, project-oriented, attitude and values promoted. There are some group discussions and project works which are advised to teachers but it is not based on developing attitude or values in a democratic world. It is generally based on protecting oneself from media's negative effects.

6. Ideally, evaluation in Media Education means student self-evaluation, both formative and summative. Indeed, Media Education attempts to change the relationship between teacher and students and taught by offering both objects for reflection and dialogue (Harland, 2004; Masterman, 1997). Suitable textbooks, other teaching materials and resources, and lesson plans that are relevant to the country/area must be available. There must be appropriate evaluation instruments which are suitable for the unique quality of media education.

When we deal with the evaluation system of media literacy education in Turkey, one can state that traditional assessment tools are not used. In fact, students' outcomes are not evaluated with a grade, in other words; no pass, no fail at the end of the course. Evaluation of the course is done with portfolios or projects. In that case, one can state that the evaluation system is suitable for the principles of European initiatives about media literacy education. As for materials used in that lesson, it is difficult to say that special instruments are provided for that course or teachers are highly qualified in terms of recognizing those materials in media literacy. In Inceoğlu's work, (2007) teachers didn't recommend any book other than the course book. They only suggested the official web site of RTUK for children. Since the booklet has been prepared by the European Council, all the links are in English and reflect the international perspective of the council.

7. Media literacy education should be supported by a sustained both initial and in-service teacher training programme (Pungente, n.year; Kerr, 2004). Faculties of education must introduce training on media literacy education, hire staff capable of training future teachers in this area and offer courses in media education. There should also be academic support from tertiary institutions in the writing of curricula and in sustained consultation (Erjavec, 2002). Besides, Boeckmann states (1992), the ultimate objective of the in-service training should not be to transmit specialist information but to fire teachers with enthusiasm for Media Education in order to assist the cross-curricular principle on the road to success.

As for teacher training, one cannot mention a special education program for teacher training in both countries. Implementing media education at schools can only be seen as the first step; the qualification of all teachers is crucial to successfully taking up and establishing media

education. In some of the EU countries, teachers are offered continuing professional development in the field, but attendance is mostly voluntary and still very much depending on the motivation of the individual teacher (Lemmen, 2005). In Greece, since there is no discrete subject for media literacy education, there is no program for teacher training. In Turkey, although there is an elective course about media literacy education, social science teachers are responsible for that course. Teaching media literacy requires a specific training on subjects like main structures of media, historical backgrounds of media, theories and effects of media and the methods for reading a text in terms of semiotic analyses, rhetoric and other related subjects. It is obvious that the specialists graduated from faculty of communication have this knowledge and instruments to teach media literacy in an efficient way. Therefore letting social science teachers to teach media literacy courses will raise the risk factor of a possible unsuccessful project. Social science teachers are taking three-day in service teaching provided by Ministry of Education. It is certain that three-day course is not effective enough for all these qualifications mentioned above. Besides, among all Faculties of Education having social science teaching department, only one university has an elective course on media literacy education in 2007-2008 education term. Therefore, it is difficult to say teachers who are responsible for media literacy course are qualified enough for this lesson.

8. Media literacy education should be assessed and evaluated at all level (Hobbs&Frost,2003).

It is evident that the evaluation of projects for the media literacy context has been neglected in the past. The results of these projects will have to be analysed in depth to gain knowledge that will be helpful for further activities and make planning for policy easier. It will be the task of researchers and experts from different disciplines to develop useful and effective methods and tools that can be applied for the evaluation and the assessment of media literacy projects.

Greece has not yet carried out many research studies on media education. There have been no studies carried out in the field of introducing media education into the Greek education system. We should mention Aslanidou's work "The myth of the passive viewer" (2000) on exploring the judgements Greek students make about TV messages. In Turkey, Inceoğlu (2007) made a research about the efficiency of elective media literacy course. According to findings of this research, although both teachers and students believed the necessity of implementation of media literacy course in the Turkish education curriculum, they failed in defining the elements of media and functions of the media. As for assessment of students' success, both in Greece and in Turkey, there are no agreed criteria or standards for assessing media literacy, and there is an urgent need for larger-scale, longer-term research to establish a body of evidence, on which such criteria could be based.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Media literacy has not found its way in the curricula of higher, secondary and primary education both in Greece and in Turkey; there are no specialist teachers of this subject, nor are there suitable textbooks for this purpose. For example, the only resource for media literacy is "The Internet Literacy Handbook prepared by the Group of Specialists on Human Rights in the Information Society carried out under the Council of Europe and translated into Turkish and published by RTUK in Turkey. Media literacy resources should be analysed and reorganized from the local perspective. Suitable textbooks, other teaching materials and resources, and lesson plans that are relevant to the country/area must be available. There must be appropriate evaluation instruments which are suitable for the unique quality of media education. Constantly changes occur concerning media, especially new media. To stay

relevant, media education must address comprehensively to the new and converging communication technologies, from multimedia to the Internet.

As regards media production for children both in Greece and in Turkey, it remains unsatisfactory in both quantitative and qualitative terms and fails to meet the needs of children in the process of their socialization and identity development. Media literacy policy applied protection as the main strategy at national level both in Greece and in Turkey. Also, learning outcomes related to media literacy are mostly based on comprehension; they should be designed according to creativity, cross-cultural communication and citizenship. The schools – from the first to the eighth grade – deal with the media only in passing, as part of the subject Turkish Language and Social sciences in Turkey; Studies of Environment in Greece. Such an approach is far from the modern concept of media literacy, which responds in much more complex ways to the commercial thrust of the media and the impact that radio, television, the Internet, and other media may have on the children's lives, either in the positive or negative sense. Students should not only learn media construction but also the media institutions, political, economic, social and cultural contexts of the media environment, media persuasion and propaganda techniques, to examine different media text and style forms, to develop the skills of analyzing the grammar of media language and to understand the basic characteristics of the essential journalistic genres. The goals of Media Education could better be achieved within a specialist Media Education course, which has its own identity, its own rooms and equipment, its own resources. These are not provided in both countries. Furthermore, the media policy strategy for children, that is, the child as a media consumer and as an object in the media, has not been clearly defined in both countries. For example, in Turkey, the control mechanisms that would force media companies to define policy for children or evaluate the success of media literacy curriculum are inadequate.

The Media literacy education should try to realize its aims through two different Media Education models: Media Education as an optional course in primary schools and Media Education as a topic within the integrated primary and secondary school curricula. If it is integrated into the secondary school curriculum as a compulsory part of specific, independent and obligatory courses, it should not be only mother tongue or second language education but also should be Sociology, Psychology and the History of Art, Visual Arts etc. When the Media Education is adopted as an optional course, it is highly dependent upon the existence of pupils who chose this course. In Turkey, for example, when the schools in the central district of Kocaeli (an industrial city close to Istanbul) are consulted for a report about the applications of the media literacy curriculum, it was understood that the course has never been applied in none of those schools because of various reasons. It means that the majority of primary school students get hardly any information about the media literacy.

Because of the lack of institutional support, Media Education is mostly dependent on the knowledge of individual teachers themselves. This reduces the possibility of integrating Media Education across the curriculum into the schools. Pre-service and in-service training should be offered to both specialized teachers, who teach Media education courses, and teachers who are integrating Media Education into other courses. However, in Turkey, social science teachers are responsible for media literacy education. Social science teachers are taking three-day in service teaching provided by Ministry of Education. Besides, among all Faculties of Education having social science teaching department, only one university provides an elective course on media literacy education in 2007-2008 education term. Therefore, it is difficult to say teachers who are responsible for media literacy course is qualified enough for this lesson.

In Greece, no adequate criteria have been noted down on a national level, but the Project "Audiovisual Education for Children and Young People<sup>10</sup>" could be a starting point for an applied qualitative research on the formal education system based on the level of media literacy among youngsters (European Commission Report, 2007). In Turkey, RTUK and Ministry of education started an elective course for media literacy education. Although the curriculum has some drawbacks it could be a starting point for media literacy of students.

Shortly, Media literacy education in Greece and in Turkey is not compatible with the necessities and principles of European initiatives about media literacy. For that reason, informal education should support formal education system. In that scope, there are some successful attempts in Greece. The Hellenic Audiovisual Institute is working on defining the best practices and the criteria on implementing media literacy on a national level. The project "School & Cinema" is a private initiative by a Greek non-profit organisation, YOUTHPLAN, for the development of young people's audiovisual communication and expression. SafeNetHome is the Greek awareness node funded by the European Commission's 'Safer Internet Action Plan'. Its mission is to promote a safer use of the Internet and of new technologies in Greece, and to awaken the Greek public concerning the Internet and dangers hidden in new technologies, through a multi-channel awareness campaign (European Commission Report, 2007). In Turkey, ILAD (Communication Research Organization), a non-governmental organization, provides seminars about media literacy. Such organizations should be developed both in quantity and quality.

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