



Research Article

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The role of school leadership in media literacy in Albanian primary education

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the influence of media in the educational system and the need for the curricula improvements, Albanian primary education case. Living in the digital era, people are definitely faced with many challenges, mainly regarding the vast information which is often excessive and comes from a variety of sources. The information students are provided with, is not always true or the appropriate knowledge they have to acquire.

In this sense, the target group that is mostly exposed to this issue are the primary and even secondary school children who do not have the maturity to analyze, filter and select what the internet offers them. Students graduating from K-12 education need media literacy skills to engage, participate, and learn in a world in which literacy must keep pace with rapidly changing technologies.

In this context, school leaders can play a very important educational and sensitizing role and become supporters of media literacy projects. Moreover, the transformative influence of principals in fostering teacher professional development emerges as a critical catalyst for literacy improvement. Leadership influence is essential in finding the instruments to improve the curricula and involve all the influential factors in raising the awareness and to prepare the future citizens with all the media sources they are living with.

Through surveys, we have collected quantitative and qualitative data from primary school leaders in South Albania regarding their attitude towards media literacy, their knowledge on the subject, as well as their ability and willingness to include media literacy in curricular or extracurricular activities with the goal of educating students from an early age to be capable of successfully facing the challenges of the digital era that are advancing and gaining more and more ground.

Keywords: media literacy, school leaders and teachers, primary schools, curriculum improvements.

1. Introduction

Living in a globalised and digital world people are faced with a lot of swift changes and progresses that we need to keep pace with the technology development. Moreover, it is the society and educational system which should make use of all the instruments in order to instil to the young generation the media and digital literacy.

We are continuously confronted with ample information and news, fed with authentic or fake facts and we consume everything we come into contact with and still we cannot be aware of what piece of information needs to be relied on or is necessary for further usage in our field of activity. Needless to say, successes and developments are also coupled with drawbacks and negative effects. The progress in technology is unstoppable and inevitable, thus it involves benefits and negative sides. The advanced technology and the explosion of information has currently paved the way towards a distraction or distortion of truth and findings which individuals and children in particular (who are born and actually growing with technology) can never know and differentiate which is what and if this is legitimate or not.

This confusion needs to be dealt with cautious measures, strategies and instruments which stem from the educational institutions and then extends further to the society and various organisations aiming at raising the awareness about issues and problems generations are facing.

Media literacy: To get an insight into this matter it is worth delving into the core of the problem and trying to find out the instruments that act as incentives for improving the situation and assisting the new generation especially school learners with their being literate in various aspects more over media literate. Let's analyse media literacy as a concept. What is media literacy? How do students reach this literacy? Has the concept changed with the passing of time? What is the situation like in schools? Are school leaders or administrators in charge of the curricula update in order to respond to these changes and advances?

In the past literacy was considered as the ability to read, write and interpret something you were supposed to be explained by the teacher into a piece of paper and also create something on a certain topic. Then accordingly the student was considered to be literate and in a way this complied with the main targets school had defined. Actually the students need to know more, the notion of literacy has expanded its meaning and underlines the ability to handle information, interpret it, make use of it in a world where they have enough, pictures, images, facts and the like and find themselves "captured" by the literacy expansion (Kiri, 2023).

Consequently, it is the media literacy education as the only way towards creating a relieved setting and encouraging critical and creative thinking skills to comprehend the expanded notion of *literacy* in the modern world. This concept is far from the previous meant interpretation, it has definitely changed with the passing of time.

Media Literacy is a 21st century approach to education. It provides a framework to access, analyze, evaluate and create messages in a variety of forms – from print to

video to the internet. Media literacy builds an understanding of the role of media in society as well as essential skills of inquiry and self-expression necessary for citizens of a democracy. What is important to understand is that media literacy is not about “protecting” kids from unwanted messages.

2. Media literacy-a current issue

It is very hard to find the persons in charge or the instruments to improve the media literacy in the school learners who are eager to acquire whatever knowledge or information the teachers and school curricula in general aim to inculcate in them. We think it is the school administrators and the leadership who are definitely responsible for the consequences of this information mess and where learned do not know what to pick out. All comes from the curricula; they need to design the curricula which provide the grounds for some prior backgrounds and advanced practices to prepare the future citizens with all the media sources they are living with.

This will help them encounter and overcome challenges and tricks which may come in their way. We are all aware that education is the key role in establishing this literacy. The teachers are obliged to follow the curricula being approved by the headmasters or even the regional institutions which in a way create the rules and the framework for all the schools to follow. Sometimes the content of the curricula remains unchanged and is appropriately updated or altered slightly just to meet the requirements of the legislations in terms of the courses extensions, number of classes, number of students and the sources of information.

It is a common occurrence that the same content can be followed for years at a stretch. It is widely noticed that the changes and the rapid developments surpass the significance and difficulty level of the curricula composition. Learners of the 21-st century are about to acquire data and figures which create a corpus of enriched vocabulary in various fields and they think or even are confident that what they see, watch, like, download or even comment on the Net is the most authentic source and the best means of being informed and learned.

Media literacy plays a pivotal role in making people aware of what they are reading, the sources this information comes from and impacts in a way our perception and attitude over the world. Media literacy education helps students and teachers with embracing the changes, the images, messages on social networks, advertisements, logos and the like. This multi media reality is shaping our views and perceptions. While at school most of the activities and teaching facilities are based on print and are mostly paper based, on daily basis students and teachers cope with some more interesting and appealing messages that create a confusion and lack of interest on the part of the students.

Therefore, in order to keep up with the progress rate and provide the schools with media literacy education will be the stepping stone towards alleviating the influence of unlimited information and shift the focus on useful, authentic and valuable things. This freedom of uploading whatever you want is changing the individual who in

fact is being moulded as a character at school first, and schools are definitely the bed for offering this education. The media is not just a means of information, cultural nourishment or influence on our behaviour, but is becoming a tool and a way in which, we carry out our professional activities. While for students and adolescents, it is the space where adolescence is lived, a place where they realize their freedom, their desires without control, except for schoolwork (Abazaj, 2024).

Therefore, a good education on the legality that guides and controls the media is a necessity for them. The media is not a space without borders, or an activity without prohibitive or reading laws. It is necessary to have in university curricula, an information program on media legislation, the functions of law enforcement units such as AMA, on cases of criminal offenses (such as incitement to forms of violence, denigration, religious or racist propaganda, the transmission of economic and cultural barriers, etc....)

Media literacy education provides a framework and pedagogy for the new literacy needed for living, working and citizenship in the 21st century. Moreover, it paves the way to mastering the skills required for lifelong learning in a constantly changing world (Thoman and Jolls, 2005).

Upon examining the effects of media and the feeds the students consume every instant we noticed that the solution is not that hard to be found. If you get the education from an early age and it is definitely the teacher who transmits this knowledge, explains the positive and negative sides as well as helping students to be not only media literate but also technology literate we are undoubtedly shaping the citizen of the modern society.

How can we come up with a curricula update? The school administrator should be alert for all the innovations and changes that happen during the school year and then put up the issue with the responsible experts who need to design and add to the curricula courses which respond to new changes and developments. Some painful, dangerous and desperate stories from the daily life (due to overuse of technology and being fed by only media sources) need to get a long term solution which prevents the generations from being invaded by the great influence of technology. Humankind has created it and needs to take it over.

3. What is the leadership role?

Leadership is an essential component of every organization, in particular educational institutions deserve a visionary strategy on account of the influence education has on every individual especially on children. The leadership success is strongly correlated with the achievements of students as well as teachers performance progress. The setting up of a positive and productive school culture, leading and assigning the responsibilities for all staff at any level of position in order to collaborate and create a very friendly, cooperative and pleasant school environment will provide the students with all the necessary information and knowledge in order to prepare them for life. The cooperative environment makes teachers liaise and interact on certain issues,

make research on teaching issues, curricula content, extracurricular classes or clubs and the like. Then, they may come up with the prospective strategies and solutions to overcome the influence of technology advances, obsessions, AI overuse in order for the new generation to be educated with the fact that not everything you see and read on the Net can be easily integrated in our activities, perceptions, attitudes and manners too.

Humans have become prisoners of technology, which has evolved into a companion in every aspect of their lives and activities undertaken. It is in this context that demands in the workplace have surpassed limits. In other words, individuals are expected to possess skills that exceed what machines can achieve, particularly in reasoning and critical thinking (Moustaghfir and Brigui, 2024).

Based on the aforementioned quote, it is clear that the leadership role is very crucial and multidimensional concerning the progress of schools. The approaches the leadership presents to the staff and students gives rise to inspirational and motivating innovative approaches, viewpoints as well as building a resourceful and appropriate environment in terms of facilities and human resources which in turn bring about a qualitative teaching and learning. When we analyse the leadership we are addressing to not only the headmasters of schools but the administration and regional and central governing bodies that impose their decisions and approaches to school leaders (Venxha, 2024).

If the headmasters and the like are well aware of the situation, conditions, relationships, hardships faced, students' satisfactions or dissatisfactions, teachers' needs, and all other issues to be resolved especially keeping up with the progress of technology and possessing the digital skills themselves, creates the grounds for meeting his or overall objectives. Their digital literacy influences his manners in the aspect of seeking to improve the teaching process, strategy, methodology, facilities and of course the curricula. So, his or her having a good command of technology will definitely mean progress. We agree to the approach that to successfully lead their schools in the twenty-first century, school administrators need to be fully informed of the problems and promise of technology. As the faculty head, the coordinators, and the communicators of school events and programs, they must use technology effectively in these roles (Richardson & McLeod, 2011)

The leadership bodies as well as the school leaders set forth the objectives to be met by the schools. They need to be aware of the problems and should address them with visionary and long-term solution i.e. the change of the curricula should be a periodical one as it keeps up with all the needs and issues that come up with the progress of technology, society, science and all fields of activity. Their competency property, knowledge, attributes and zeal gives them the opportunity to examine educational system, cultivate the connections with all the involved influential actors and inspire others.

The influence of principals extends beyond curriculum decisions to encompass professional development initiatives for teachers. Professional development is a key avenue through which principals can enhance teacher effectiveness in literacy

instruction (Reinking, 2001).

We underline the fact that it is the leadership role which will revolutionise the response to the rapid developments in technology and improve the media literacy capability on the part of the students and as a result this is handed down to all generations which form the solid conception of being aware of the ins and outs of any news or data you are faced with. Education at school on media influence and content by being taught with all the instruments it has to provide you with information and these have a long term effect on the society. Moreover, the curricula update which should align with the advances will foster changes and improvements in the new generation moulding and manners. It is imperative to consider this curriculum as fundamental to the issue of media literacy, either a compulsory or optional course in all levels of education.

4. The situation in various schools in the south of Albania

In order to examine the matter further and see the views of teachers and school leaders we distributed several questionnaires to teachers and school leaders first and the second stage to students. The data collected and processed provided a clear picture of the need to involve media literacy in their curricula. Almost all teachers agreed to the fact that curricula need to be updated every now and then and that they find it difficult to keep up with the progress of technology. The digital era has stimulated them to come up with various tactics to make students understand the amount of contact they should have with media, what to believe or which source of information is more legitimate.

Nevertheless, according to them these are extra attempts and sometimes as separate activities to raise the awareness. What teachers really require to do is to deal with media so as to build up the students' literacy, is to include a full course in the secondary level and moreover having some prior information in the elementary schools as well. On the other hand, the school leaders do accept the fact that the curricula needs to be close to the progress and breakthroughs of the digital era, still they emphasize the fact that the media literacy is transmuted to students in an direct or indirect way. From the elementary school to secondary level they are part of different extracurricular activities which make them realise the pros and cons of technology and the information they come across on daily basis.

According to school leaders their staffs are doing the utmost to bring to life and experience the reality in school, which helps students to understand the risks and be educated with their appropriate reaction and behaviour when they come into contact with the information from several Net sites. But, almost all school leaders, headmasters or headmistress do underline the fact that involving Media Literacy in the school curricula either from the elementary level to the secondary level as a compulsory course would be very helpful for the students in order to prevent the issues and troubles this creates in the future.

When it comes to students they are fully aware of the fact that networks cover

most of their reading and it is the influence of media which shapes their opinions, attitudes and conceptions. The information they get from the network is considered as authentic and they not only see it as widening their knowledge on a certain topic but also they involve it in the school projects, creative tasks, discussions but most importantly they are completely impacted by these sources. They form opinions on various matters; they create prejudices, change attitudes and try to get as more information as they can by browsing various platforms and sites. They think that this information is eye catching, more interesting and appealing compared to what they read in books or even learn at school. 80 % of the students responded to the fact that they totally believe in all the information, data, figures, videos and images they read on the Net. Also, they mention the fact that they cannot do without this feed.

5. Conclusion

Through surveys, we have collected quantitative and qualitative data from primary school leaders in Albania regarding their attitude towards media literacy, their knowledge on the subject, as well as their ability and willingness to include Media Literacy in curricular or extracurricular activities with the goal of educating students from an early age to be capable of successfully facing the challenges of the digital era that is advancing and gaining more and more ground.

In conclusion, it is imperative for the school to have some innovative technological environment and facilities and most importantly the change of curriculum will save this digital age generation from being trapped in a pot of mixed and confusing information. The education of how to use the media for their own good and to prepare them for their field of study, for being responsible citizen in a world when everything is moving at a fast and frightening pace. The response to any risk, issue or trouble which society faces is forever school education.

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