



REVIEW

from **Professor Greta Dermendjieva, Ph.D., FJMC**

(scientific position, academic degree, name, surname, educational / scientific institution)

for obtaining the educational and scientific degree **"Doctor" in professional field 3.5. Social Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications – Media language and style)**

with a dissertation on the topic: **"MEDIA LITERACY: UNDERSTANDING AND USING MEDIA TEXT IN UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL"**,

presented by **Neli Ilieva Ilieva, full -time doctoral student in the Department "Press Journalism and Book Publishing" of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication**

with supervisor: **Professor Andreana Eftimova, DSc**

I. Presentation of the doctoral (PhD) student / applicant on the basis of the submitted documentation

Neli Ilieva Ilieva works as a senior teacher in Bulgarian language and literature at the 127th Secondary School "Ivan Nikolaevich Denkoglu" in Sofia and is a full-time doctoral student in the department of "Press Journalism and Book Publishing" at the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication with supervisor Prof. Dr. Andreana Eftimova. She has issued textbooks, tests, literature worksheets, etc.

II. Assessment of the qualities of the text of the dissertation

Neli Ilieva's dissertation is 233 pages long, structured in an introduction, four chapters (three theoretical and one empirical) with a total of 29 paragraphs and subsections, a conclusion, a bibliography, and appendices.

The presentation of the text has a good structure. It follows the logic of the tasks set by the doctoral student, fulfilling the standard requirements necessary for presenting scientific and applied research. In general, the technical performance of the dissertation work with the mandatory input elements, methodical scientific apparatus, design, and overall layout of the text is at a very good level.



There is a balance between the individual chapters of the dissertation - three entirely theoretical and one empirical chapters. A balance is also available between the scientific review, the theoretical part, and the author's empirical research.

The doctoral student freely uses the terminology in many studies and authors' academic publications on the dissertation topic. The empirical research conducted shows an excellent level of scientific competence.

Information sources. Bibliography

Neli Ilieva based her dissertation on 101 scientific sources - 59 in Bulgarian, 38 in English, 4 in Russian, and 13 documents and reports. The sources are in the field of linguistic sciences, media literacy and civic education, key competencies, etc., and some of them have been published in the last five years. There are included contemporary studies on the motivation and reading attitudes of young people in our country, the digital and media competence of students and teachers, the development of critical thinking, etc. The sources are described according to the standard.

Relevance and significance of the thesis issue

The topicality of the topic is undoubted, especially in the current post-COVID-19 period, which is critical for education worldwide. Online learning, the massive volume of Internet sources with varying degrees of credibility, and the supremacy of social networks as a source of information over traditional mass media are challenges for the modern digital generations. The children of the Alpha generation, born after 2010, do not know the analog world we have lived. Having grown up with tablets and computers, flexible in multitasking, they find it difficult to confine themselves to physical classrooms' temporal and spatial dimensions. Information and knowledge obtained out of school many times exceed that inside. That is why media literacy is a crucial competence, necessitating special measures in media education as part of high school education. It is not an easy task due to the commitment of Bulgarian to European educational policies, which must be put into practice with the introduction of new educational strategies and curricula.



That is why Neli Ilieva's research outlining the current picture of school education in terms of its ability to prepare students to cope in the digital media world has an undoubted scientific and scientific-practical contribution.

Analytical characterization of the content. Purpose, object, subject, tasks, and methodology of the research

The dissertation examines the importance of one of the social competencies learned in civics education in high school classes, namely, media literacy. Along with other aspects of civic education such as critical thinking and argumentation, problem-solving and decision making, project management, constructive communication in different social environments, informed participation in the social and political life of the country, etc., media literacy is also important – competence related to all others. The topic of media literacy is particularly relevant today in the time of the COVID-19 infodemic. In her research, the Ph.D. student successfully proves that while it is not yet a priority in civics education, it should be. In the dissertation work, the conclusions are drawn that media texts, currently used only as sources of additional information at the initiative of individual teachers, should enter more actively into the learning process, and the educational system should rethink its role. Handling a media text as a critical source of information in a real-life social environment requires purposeful and systematic work in high school education.

The presented dissertation reveals the doctoral student's ability to analyze theoretical sources and do empirical research, which is necessary for the argumentation of the research thesis and hypothesis. The dissertation has a neat structure and clearly formulated goals, tasks, object, and subject of the research.

The research methodology is well presented, the thesis, hypothesis, and objectives are clearly postulated, and the empirical material is comprehensively visualized with diagrams illustrating the conclusions. The data are processed correctly with adequate statistical methods so that the doctoral student can demonstrate generalization skills on their base.

Neli Ilieva also has the ability to synthesize different perceptions and concepts, based on which she presents her position and formulates conclusions.



The object of the study is the media literacy of students in high school.

The subject of the study is the possibility of working with media texts to form key competencies necessary for successful personal realization and lifelong learning.

The goal of the offered study is to present the work with media texts in the high school stage and to check how the students use them, as well as to establish to what extent the educational system uses the possibilities of the media text. The doctoral student unfolds this goal in 6 specific research tasks, which are realized in the research thesis.

The dissertation contains a **thesis** and a **hypothesis** (that should be verified). **The formulated thesis** is that building media literacy is a long-term and multi-component process for which targeted institutional care is needed. The curricula operating in the Bulgarian education system are partially in line with this social need. However, they still do not meet the real needs, and even when they are normatively supported, they prove challenging to apply in practice. This problem is evident in the high school stage of secondary education, where **the work with media texts, which determines the acquisition and improvement of media literacy**, is poorly represented.

The thesis also argues that media texts, being multifunctional in methodological aspects, are highly suitable to work in all academic disciplines and provide unlimited opportunities for mastering different topics of educational content. They are also suitable for building civic culture and acquiring and enhancing functional literacy.

The hypothesis assumes that there are deficits in education in the high school stage of secondary school, which **do not allow the construction of high levels of media literacy**. Modern Bulgarian high school students do not have enough knowledge about the media, do not consider the sources of information, are not interested in the authorship of media messages, are uncritical and too trusting of what they read, do not understand authentic media texts in a real media environment, do not always distinguish fact from opinion and are susceptible to manipulation. They experience serious difficulties when reading media texts with a high degree of informativeness - they fail to decode part of the information, do not make intertextual



connections, do not recognize specific stylistic and linguistic features, and do not consider the media text's overall impact.

Research methods include **examination** and **analysis** of scientific developments on the topic and normative documents revealing European Union policies related to media literacy. Also include a study of the presence of media texts in the Bulgarian language and literature textbooks for the high school stage, as well as an **experimental study** of the media literacy of upper secondary school students by applying media texts with different degrees of informativeness.

In the **first chapter**, "Media Literacy: Sociocultural Aspects," key concepts such as media literacy, mass communication, media culture, mediatization, mediamorphosis, and media reality are clarified with an emphasis on the specifics of digital media. Mass communication theories related to communication as a process of persuasion are examined, such as Cultivation Theory, Mass Media's Limited Effects Theory, Stuart Hall's Theory of Encoding/Decoding, Uses and Gratification Theory, Media system dependency theory, Active audience theory, Social Action Theory, etc. Emphasis is also placed on media functions and effects, on the impact of the media through visual images, and basic communication models explaining the dependence between social processes and education development are examined. A place is given to media functionalism - a direction in the study of mass communication, according to which the media perform functions are decisive for their place in social life.

Chapter two examines the relationship between media literacy and media education. Media education is examined in its function as a leading factor for acquiring and increasing media literacy in the context of the competence-based educational approach laid down in the documents of the current educational policies of the European Union and the state educational requirements and curricula in the educational system of Bulgaria. Media, digital and digital-media literacy are distinguished, the first of which is present as the ninth key competence in the Lifelong Learning Reference Framework.

The **third chapter** is devoted to the media text, its typology, specificity, understanding, and use, and its role as an object of study in secondary education. The main characteristics of the media text in the context of communication are highlighted with a focus on its perception and possible reading problems.



The influence of the reader's needs and attitudes on the structuring, style, and manner of presentation of the texts, the ability to understand a media text as the essential part of media literacy, etc., has been traced. The results for reading literacy from the study of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) have been compared with the data from similar studies conducted among Bulgarian students, as well as from the Media Literacy Index of the Open Society Institute. They support the thesis that working with a media text is decisive for acquiring and improving media literacy.

The contributing part in this chapter is the highlighted five problems related to the media literacy of Bulgarian students and the formulated ideas for expanding the presence of media texts in work on the academic disciplines studied at the high school stage.

III. Contributions to the dissertation research

The doctoral student formulates seven scientific contributions in her dissertation. Accepting in full the contributions indicated by Neli Ilieva, I would emphasize in particular the consideration of the media text as a determining factor for acquiring and increasing media literacy. Also, indicating opportunities for complex work with media texts in the overall learning process in the high school stage as a means of developing key competencies. Another contribution point is the development of a methodology, through 2 experiments, to examine the skills of high school students to understand media texts on the same issue and with a high degree of informativeness.

The study of media texts in Bulgarian language textbooks for high school education and the tracing of the interrelationships between reading and media literacy, between the perception of a media text and functional literacy, are a good basis for developing scientific knowledge in the direction of clarifying what approaches from the European experience will work here and how to bring together the actions of different professionals, communities and institutions to prepare strategies to increase the media literacy of students.

IV. Notes and recommendations

Neli Ivanova's dissertation is written highly competently. The theoretical review is done with good terminology knowledge and free handling of the primary sources on the subject. Empirical



studies have been conducted, described, and analyzed with scientific integrity and correctness, and the results support the thesis and hypothesis.

The methodology outlines the research boundaries, outside of which remain the state of media literacy in the primary and junior high school stages of secondary school, the state of media literacy in higher schools for pedagogical specialists in media education training, extracurricular factors for the formation of media literacy and the presence of media texts in textbooks for the high school stage in all academic disciplines.

The doctoral student complied with the recommendations proposed during the internal defense, which made her work even more complete and justified.

She collected the empirical parts of the dissertation in one chapter, reducing the number of chapters from 6 to 4, which contributed to the tighter structure of the text. She further developed the contribution points in the work. She emphasized the development of a methodology for researching the skills of high school students to understand media texts, as well as the proposal to unite the actions of various specialists, communities, and institutions to prepare strategies for increasing media literacy.

Although in the dissertation, Neli Ilieva did not explicitly emphasize the proof of the thesis and the confirmation of the formulated hypothesis, they are unequivocally protected both theoretically and as a result of the author's research. The conclusions drawn show students' difficulties in comparing information and distinguishing between objective and subjective, lack of experience in reading media texts, forming and expressing their position, critical thinking, and recognizing the mechanisms of impact of the media text.

In its finished form, Neli Ilieva's dissertation has all the merits necessary for qualitative research - topicality, professional implementation of the theoretical and empirical analysis, and scientific and practical contributions.

Evaluation of the abstract

The abstract has a volume of 41 pages (format A4), and its structure follows the content of the dissertation chronologically. The abstract reflects the content of the original work and gives an



accurate idea of the goals, tasks, stages, and results of the conducted research. The main problem areas investigated in the dissertation are presented in a synthesized way.

V. Publications and participation in scientific forums

Doctoral student Neli Ilieva has presented a list of 5 publications (two in print) - 2 reports at international scientific conferences, and 3 papers in proceedings directly related to the topic of the dissertation work.

VI. Conclusion

Bearing in mind the topicality of the topic, the good theoretical analysis supported by a survey among high school students, the conclusions and the recommendations made for taking steps to increase media literacy in secondary schools, I recommend the respected scientific jury to award Neli Ilieva Ilieva the educational and the scientific degree "Doctor" in professional direction 3.5 - Public Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications - Media Language and Style) for her dissertation work "Media Literacy: Comprehension and Use of Media Text in Upper Secondary School)".

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Ph.D.

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