



OPINION

of Prof. Dr. Efrem Efremov, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

for the acquisition of the Scientific degree "doctor" in professional field 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications – Media Language and Style) with dissertation on: "Media Literacy: Understanding and use of media text in the upper course of the Secondary School", presented by Nelly Ilieva, a full-time doctoral student at the Department of "Press Journalism and Book Publishing" of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication with supervisor Prof. Ph.D. Andreana Eftimova

I. Evaluation of the qualities of the dissertation text

The topic of the dissertation is directly related to one of the most topical problems discussed both by media studies and by modern humanities – the problem of media literacy. The development is timely and fits into the scientific discussion of socially significant issues accompanying the successful personal realization in the conditions of digital media culture. The study is innovative in addressing the issue of media literacy at the upper secondary school stage. The study of the issue in the specific school environment provides answers to a number of important questions affecting the overall process of acquisition and development of media literacy.

The presentation testifies to the in-depth study of the theoretical sources and the ability to connect existing scientific positions with the subject and with the goals of the research. In the first chapter, the concept of *media literacy* is highlighted in the meaning of social and cultural context and is linked to the key concepts of modern humanitarian studies, such as *mass communication*, *media culture*, *mediatization*, *mediamorphosis*. The specifics of the information society and the peculiarities of media reality are clarified through well-balanced references to scientific works by Neil Postman, Jean Baudrillard, Umberto Eco, Manuel Castells, Robert Cubby, Alexander Fedorov. The media literacy of high-school students is conceptualized as part of the complex media-audience relationship discussed in research by Carl Hovland, Harold Kelly, Albert Bandura, Stuart Hall, Sandra Paul-Rokich, George Gerbner, Matthew McAllister and others. Emphasis is placed on media functions and media effects, by examining the main communication models, through which the connections between social processes and the development of education are explained. In this part of her work, doctoral student Ilieva reveals a broad view of the problem by referring to different authoritative sources from various fields of humanitarian studies.

In the second chapter, media literacy is examined as an outcome of media education and its models. The possibilities of media education to fit into the competency-based educational approach have been outlined, emphasizing the interdisciplinary nature of media education and the options to develop all key competencies through that. Here, doctoral student Ilieva connects the development of media education in historical terms with the leading contemporary trends in European and Bulgarian education.

In accordance with the stated thesis that the understanding of a media text is decisive for media literacy, the third chapter pays attention to the specificity of media text. Having identified 14 of its main features, the author has analysed its presence in the Bulgarian language textbooks and in the



overall high-school education. The author has also outlined the relationship between native language learning, reading and media literacy, reporting on the insufficient use of media text in the educational process. Doctoral student Ilieva demonstrates knowledge of the specifics of media text and a wide-ranging understanding of its application in education - for working on specific topics, for making interdisciplinary connections, for building a civic culture, for developing language competences.

From what was presented in the theoretical part, the ability to take a comprehensive view of the problem and think about it in general cultural terms and specifically in the context of Bulgarian secondary education is demonstrated. These theoretical observations are tied to the European educational policies and the state educational standards in Bulgaria. The objective assessment is highlighted that the work to achieve media literacy is long-term and complex, underlining the need to avoid extreme positions about media influence on high-school students, to examine and understand media functions according to the peculiarities and needs of students, and to look for opportunities for reconciliation of media effects with educational processes.

For the purposes of this dissertation, two original experiments were conducted, correctly and precisely described and analysed, through which the understanding of media texts with different degree of information level was investigated. The objectives of the experiments were clearly formulated, the chosen methods were convincingly presented, their purpose and the selection of the working texts were explained in a reasoned manner. The research on the media literacy of upper-year students was carried out through several specifically designed surveys, the questions of which were targeted and varied, allowing for an in-depth study of different aspects of the problem. During the preparation for the surveys, the doctoral student demonstrated skills for combining elements of familiar models and developing new ones, creating questionnaires of maximum functionality, in which the precise wording and the balance between the different types of questions were impressive. The results of the questionnaires were processed correctly, detailed and in-depth analyses were made, from which summarised conclusions were drawn. The stated hypothesis was then verified and proven through the experimental research, the results of which were illustrated by numerous graphs and tables. Among the merits of both experiments stood out the careful selection of media texts, tailored to the student audience and reading in the school environment, the decision to read online to explore a situation as close to reality as possible, the study of reading skills of visual images accompanying the media texts.

The indicated bibliography (114 sources in Bulgarian, English and Russian) reveals awareness of the doctoral student in the field of cultural studies, media studies, linguistics, sociology, psychology, pedagogy, teaching methods in Bulgarian, as well as a good knowledge of normative documents from the field of education .

The text of the dissertation is well structured according to the requirements – it contains an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion, bibliography and appendices, figures (diagrams and photos), tables.

The presentation is distinguished by a very good balance between scientific stylistics and linguistic means ensuring ease of reading. The book standards are respected.



The abstract appropriately presents the text of the dissertation both in terms of content and structure.

II. Contributions of Dissertation Research

I would rate the contributions of the dissertation research as substantial due to the following qualities:

- It connects existing knowledge from different scientific fields and purposefully unites them around its subject - the media literacy of upper-year students.
- It examines in depth the problem in a specific educational environment and clearly outlines its parameters in it, setting a model of analysis that can be used in whole or in part to study the same problem in other educational stages, as well as in other areas of life.
- It formulates a hypothesis that is confirmed through the conducted experiment and creates prerequisites for unifying expert and institutional efforts to build a comprehensive strategy for increasing media literacy.
- It develops a methodology for the purposes of experimental research, which could serve as a basis for further studies on the topic.
- It collects, systematizes, and summarizes empirical data that can be used across a broad academic and social spectrum.

III. Notes and recommendations

Because the topics of the dissertation paper are exceptionally up-to-date, based on the conclusions drawn in it, I believe that Nelly Ilieva's research could continue in the direction of developing a proposal for a complex of activities through which to acquire and develop media literacy in high-school education. The dissertation highlights possibilities to work with media text that give us reason to think about creating and popularizing innovative educational practices in which these possibilities could find specific application.

In this regard, my questions to the doctoral student are the following:

1. Is it possible to create a model of teaching media literacy to upper-class students? What specific activities are possible at the school, class or lecture level?
2. What changes are needed in the education system to stimulate work for higher media literacy?
3. What could be the role of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication in this process?



IV. Publications and participation in scientific forums

Nelly Ilieva has 5 publications on the subject and has participated in 2 doctoral seminars and 2 international scientific conferences. The publications and participation of the doctoral student in scientific forums fully conform with the requirements of The rules and regulations on the terms and conditions for acquiring scientific degrees and occupying academic positions of the SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" for approving and disclosing the results of the research according to Art. 5, Paragraph 5. The minimum national requirements under Art. 63, Para. 1, Item 4 and Art. 69, Para. 3 have been met.

V. Conclusions

Based on the listed merits of the dissertation work - innovative and interdisciplinary nature, theoretical depth, originality of the experimental part, precision of the research and credibility of its conclusions, I propose to award Nelly Ilieva the scientific degree of "doctor" in the professional field "3.5 Public communications and information sciences".

Date:

Reviewer: