

REVIEW

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*For obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" (PhD) in professional field 1.2
Pedagogy (Media Pedagogy)*

With a dissertation on the topic: " Practical aspects of media literacy"

Presented by Zhivko Rachev

with supervisor: Prof. Danail Danov, DSc.

1. General characteristics of the dissertation

Structure, volume. The dissertation follows a classical structure - introduction, 3 chapters, conclusion, bibliography. The total volume is 190 pages in word format of 16 paragraphs. The literature sources used are 103 in Bulgarian and English. The work takes us from theory (media, media literacy), through various European documents and practices to the results of our own research.

Topic Relevance. In a hypermedia world, the topic of media literacy is not losing its relevance, on the contrary, it is still on the agenda. Its importance can be seen in the attempts of various communication professionals (especially in the political sector) to destabilise the audience's understanding of facts and truth. Different interpretations are offered by the media and analysts on a range of important issues and the result is a confused and uncertain society. As a result, issues of public importance are often absent from the media (this is clearly not just a Bulgarian case, but a mass media problem) or the focus is shifted towards downplaying or seeking the scandalous element. Of course, the topic of media literacy is multifaceted and we can look for its manifestations from working with a computer and the word program to the topic of the media's responsibility towards the selection of news, criticalness towards the powerful of the day and their responsibility towards the audience.

Unfortunately, since 2016 the experts' assessment of the level of media literacy in our country has been very low. This is just more proof of the topicality of the issue and the need for serious action - trainings for different age and social groups.

Against this backdrop, the author of this dissertation rightly focuses on the educational function of and for the media. I agree with his observation that while in other countries technology (media in a broader sense) is successfully used for the purpose of education, in our country there is much to be desired in this direction. I would say that there is a lack of

willingness on the part of the state to work seriously in this direction - unlike other countries in the European Union, there is no well-developed state policy and commitment in Bulgaria (we do not yet have a national media literacy strategy and well-organised training in secondary and higher education), and this means a high risk for the existence of media pluralism. This is why it is so important to have media pedagogy in schools, through which young people will be media literate and understand the importance of media freedom, media responsibility and audience behaviour in the media.

An important clarification regarding the text and the research conducted is the inclusion of the topic of Kovid 19 and how the pandemic has brought to the forefront the importance of media literacy in living and learning transferred online. While the author states that he regrets that the situation necessitated the study to be conducted in a pandemic setting and consequently placed limitations on the surveys and interviews, I believe that a contribution comes from this - the responses allow problems to be outlined and solutions to be proposed. The crisis has indeed, in educational and communication terms, offered opportunities that can be exploited in a normal environment. Something the author calls forced media literacy has happened

In the first chapter, "Media Education in the Context of the Relationship of Pedagogy and Media", the author focuses on aspects of media literacy in educational systems. It analyses the theoretical approach to media studies according to age groups and in the context of the importance of public communications and the participation of parents, teachers and students in the media process. The author rightly draws attention to the interrelationship between the development of media literacy in children and students and their socialization and civic participation skills.

The focus of Chapter 2, entitled "Theoretical and Experimental Parameters of the Study", is on the analysis of a number of European documents. Together with this, a comparison of practices in European Union countries, mainly France and Bulgaria, is made. This analysis shows that Bulgaria is seriously lagging behind other countries on topics such as people's civic responsibility; respect for others; reducing or eliminating the digital divide; developing the ability to make informed choices, especially regarding illegal and harmful content online, etc.

The third chapter proposes an "Analysis of effective media literacy formation among media education subjects". Here the results of a large-scale pan-European study are presented with four main questions:

1. Children's, students', teachers' and parents' own use of media technologies.
2. The information load of children, students, teachers and parents on the possible adverse effects of media.
3. Practical aspects of children's, students', teachers' and parents' and social groups' contacts with the media.
4. Grouping possible aspects of family community contacts with the media.

The study allows to follow the media-education relationship from the perspective of three important groups - children (students), parents and teachers. The results are important and offer insight into how to make a qualitative integration of media literacy into the educational process happen. The problems identified could find good solutions to fix them. One trend the author sees is towards working on expanding children's digital skills, and the other trend could be developed by expanding the links between the school and its partners.

2. Evaluation of the obtained scientific and applied results

Zhivko Rachev offers three scientific contributions, which I accept as correctly defined. He has systematized them in terms of:

- contribution to theory (analysis of the media-education relationship), which allows him to define digital and media literacy as an approach and process that relates to the goals of media education;

- research contribution (measuring the relative effectiveness of different mediation or methods in building media literacy in children and students);

- practical contribution (practical aspects of media literacy targeting children, students and specific social groups are considered).

3. Critical comments, recommendations and questions

My most substantive comment is regarding the place of such attributes of scientific inquiry as object, subject, goals, objectives, hypothesis, methodology. These are included in chapter two, whereas their place is in the introduction. If the author intends to publish his dissertation as a book, he should make careful technical editing of the text - omitting words, citations, renaming some "tables" to diagrams.

Of course, these notes in no way devalue the text or detract from its merits.

I have two questions for the doctoral student:

(1) What weaknesses in the educational process has the pandemic illuminated in terms of skills and competencies, mainly in teachers?

(2) What was the biggest challenge for teachers, parents and students in the context of media literacy that teachers, parents and students faced and how was it addressed in the countries studied?

4. Conclusion

The dissertation has a strong practical-applied character (without belittling the theoretical work). It addresses an important and underdeveloped topic for practical media literacy education. The finding on the relationship between media knowledge and social life provides an important clue as to what is the essential focus of the discussion on media literacy and media literacy development. Media literacy is not only about the use of digital tools but, as Zhivko Rachev proves, it is important for civil society and for a pluralistic media environment because it teaches critical thinking. The research approach used, an exploratory study, is well chosen to meet the objectives. The text complies with the RRDA, and the dissertation seriously exceeds the minimum national requirements with 10 publications - 7 in Bulgarian and 3 in English. The abstract correctly presents the essence of the text. This gives me a reason to propose to the scientific jury to award the degree of Doctor of Education and Science in the professional field 1.2. Pedagogy (Media Pedagogy) to Zhivko Georgiev Rachev for his work on "Practical Aspects of Media Literacy" and to state that I will give my positive vote.

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