

Educating for truth

The state of media literacy and the
challenges of inclusion in teaching curricula

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INTRODUCTION

This report analyzes the current state of media literacy in Kosovo, particularly within the pre-university education system, including primary and secondary schools. The findings of the report indicate that, so far, there have been no concrete initiatives from the institutional level to address media literacy as an urgent and priority need within the educational system. With the current curriculum and teaching plans, media literacy is treated only as a cross-curricular issue in pre-university education in Kosovo.

Although the current teaching curriculum of the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation (MESTI) mandates the inclusion of media literacy as a cross-curricular theme in all regular subjects within pre-university education, the extent of its integration by teachers in various subjects remains unknown. The ministry has identified that subjects such as "Language and Literature" and "Civic Education" include topics related to media literacy. Moreover, MESTI, responsible for educational policies in the country, does not plan to revise the curriculum to include media literacy as a mandatory subject for primary and secondary school students in Kosovo. Instead, it prefers an interdisciplinary integration of media literacy through various subjects.

Despite this, recent years have seen some positive movements from school institutions and teachers in pre-university education to include media literacy as an elective course in schools. In several schools, media literacy is already offered as an elective course, which is permitted under the current curriculum. However, due to the lack of standardized textbooks for media literacy in primary and secondary schools, teachers must prepare the teaching materials for students who choose media literacy as an elective course, which has its own financial and professional costs. Moreover, there is no official data on the number of schools and teachers offering media literacy as an elective subject or the number of students interested in taking media literacy as an elective course.

Some of the main challenges of this process, directly or indirectly related to media literacy, are listed as follows:

- Teaching in pre-university education continues to be cultivated in a traditional and mechanical form, despite the new curriculum aiming to promote skill development and critical thinking among students. Meanwhile, schools in Kosovo are noticeably lagging in terms of digitalization and contemporary educational trends. Additionally, educators' knowledge of media literacy is also perceived to be lacking by experts in the field.
- Implementation of the curriculum by teachers presents another challenge for which empirical information and data are lacking. Moreover, there is a lack of information regarding the monitoring of curriculum implementation in pre-university education, especially regarding the level of integration of media literacy as a cross-curricular theme in primary and secondary schools.
- Teacher training for media literacy is primarily conducted by non-governmental organizations and international organizations funded by foreign donors. According to data, over 3,500 teachers have been trained in media literacy in Kosovo in recent years by these non-governmental and international organizations. However, this reliance on external funding sources results in training programs that are not sustainable or regular. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education continues to treat media literacy training programs as "supplementary" or secondary, failing to prioritize the professional development of teachers in media literacy. Meanwhile, a challenge in itself is the impact of these trainings on teachers in raising awareness among students about the importance of media literacy and how effectively teachers can transmit the professional knowledge gained from these training programs to their students.
- Civil society organizations in Kosovo consistently contribute significantly to the training of youth, including secondary school and university students, emphasizing the importance of media literacy. A key challenge in this regard is the sustainability of these trainings, as they rely financially on donations from the international donor community. However, civil society in Kosovo and international organizations continue to advocate for the integration of media literacy into regular educational processes.
- Despite the lack of official information on the implementation of the teaching curriculum in primary and secondary schools, data from the 2022 PISA test

place Kosovo at the bottom of the list in terms of critical thinking among Kosovan students. Their knowledge in reading, mathematics, and science is exceptionally weak, particularly in solving complex problems, critical thinking, and effective communication. This may reflect the overall quality of pre-university education and teaching in Kosovo. However, according to the 2022 PISA report for Kosovo, our students almost can't understand long texts and distinguish between fact and opinion, which is related to media literacy.

- Kosovo was ranked near the bottom of the European Media Literacy Index in 2023 by the Open Society Institute in Sofia. According to measurements from this index in 2023, out of 41 European countries assessed for media literacy, Kosovo ranked second to last at 40th place with only 21 points, one place above Georgia ranked last (41st) with 20 points. This index measures media literacy through specific indicators such as education level, media environment, societal trust, and use of new participation tools.
- According to official data from the Kosovo Agency of Statistics, 98.06% of households in Kosovo have internet access, with the highest usage among the younger age group of 16-24-year-olds. This age group includes secondary school students, indicating widespread internet penetration among students. However, this also poses risks as they are directly exposed to various online content without limitations, including online media, social media, and other websites on the internet.

This report aims to depict the state of media literacy in pre-university education and offers several recommendations as necessary steps to make specific improvements in the teaching process regarding media literacy in Kosovo's schools. The recommendations are intended to assist all stakeholders (the Ministry of Education, municipalities, schools, non-governmental and international organizations, donor communities, etc.) in urgently prioritizing the integration of media literacy into the educational system.

Methodology

This report aims to depict the state of media literacy in pre-university education and offers several recommendations as necessary steps to make specific improvements in the teaching process regarding media literacy in Kosovo's schools. The recommendations are intended to assist all stakeholders (the Ministry of Education, municipalities, schools, non-governmental and international organizations, donor communities, etc.) in urgently prioritizing the integration of media literacy into the educational system.

- The first section of the report reviews literature from international and European organizations in the field of media literacy. Archives of UNESCO publications have been scrutinized to define the concept of media and information literacy broadly. Additionally, materials published by the European Union and the Council of Europe have aided in framing this topic to make the concept of media and information literacy more accessible to diverse audiences.
- Regarding the second section of the report dedicated entirely to media literacy in Kosovo, a total of ten (10) interviews were conducted. These interviews include senior officials from MESTI-Innovation, teachers from public and private schools who teach media literacy at the primary and secondary levels, civil society activists, experts in pre-university education and media literacy issues, journalists, and officials from international organizations in Kosovo. Additionally, other materials published in Kosovo's media and publications and strategies from the Ministry of Education have been reviewed.

The preparation of this report has been constrained by the apparent lack of resources addressing media literacy in pre-university schooling. Therefore, as one of the few initiatives for integrating media literacy into primary and secondary schools in Kosovo, this report aims to shed light on some of the critical and pressing issues regarding media literacy in Kosovo. These issues primarily affect students of primary and secondary schools, teachers, and educational institutions overall.

1. MEDIA LITERACY CONCEPT

The pervasive and widespread influence of traditional and online media, social media, and digital technology tools through internet interaction (computers, mobile phones, and other advanced digital devices) in recent decades has underscored the urgent need to educate generations on how to consume news from media sources, use technological devices responsibly, and understand their potential benefits or harms for society at large.

Media literacy helps individuals develop a healthy criticism towards media information. This includes the ability to assess sources, content, and the intentions behind the information they receive, as well as understanding how media influences their perceptions and opinions. At a time when media is saturated with vast amounts of information and diverse influences, media literacy can empower people to cultivate independent thinking and opinions by analyzing and evaluating information objectively.

The media landscape is continuously evolving, driven by technological advancements and new platforms. Media literacy can help people adapt to these changes and use technology and media in a smart and responsible manner. The rapid pace of technological change and the widespread use of social platforms have made disinformation a significant issue. Media literacy can assist individuals in identifying and avoiding disinformation by equipping them with tools to verify and assess the information they receive.

For this purpose, institutions and international organizations have been engaged in defining media literacy in an increasingly interconnected world dominated by rapid information and digital technology.

1.1. THE UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION (UNESCO)

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has arguably contributed the most to shaping the concept of media literacy from an educational and scientific perspective. According to UNESCO, the simplest understanding of 'media literacy' is the ability to comprehend the functions of media, evaluate how these functions are applied in practice, and rationally engage with media for expression.[1] However, in pursuit of a more comprehensive understanding of this complex subject, UNESCO has integrated the notion of media literacy with that of 'information literacy', which underscores the importance of accessing information, as well as ethically assessing and utilizing such information.[2] While these two concepts differ (media literacy from information literacy), UNESCO has unified them into the concept of "Media and Information Literacy"[3] to emphasize simultaneously the significance of both media and information in a single concept.

In Kosovo, this notion may be relatively new and unfamiliar due to the lack of adequate literature in Albanian, the underutilization of this concept by field professionals (academics, researchers, experts, journalists, etc.), and as a result of superficial treatment of media and information literacy by various stakeholders. On the other hand, in English ("Media and Information Literacy", known as MIL), there is already widespread use of media and information literacy, aimed at educating societies about the role and impact of media and information in general through formal and informal education.

To clarify these two concepts that constitute media and information literacy, UNESCO published a teaching curriculum in 2013 for educators on this topic[1], clearly distinguishing between information literacy and media literacy, as shown in the table below:

[1] Grizzle, A., & Wilson, C. (Eds.). (2011). Media and Information Literacy: Curriculum for Teachers, p. 18. Paris: UNESCO.

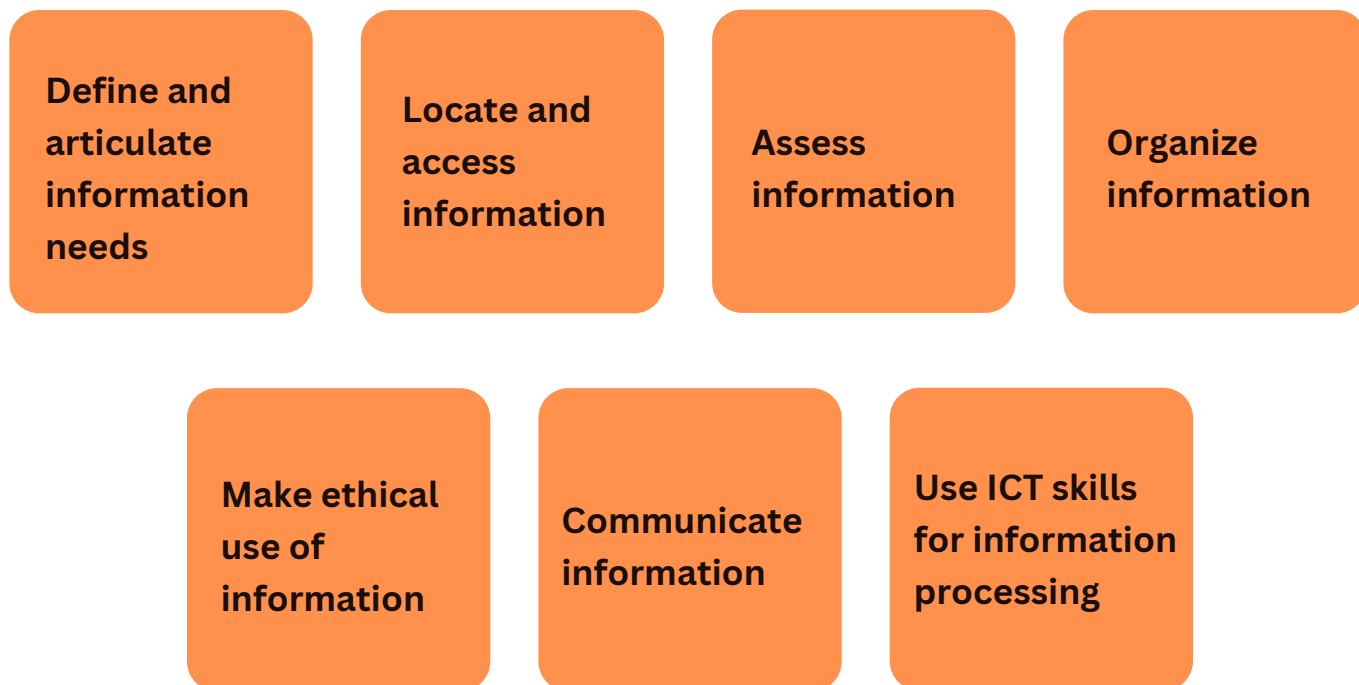
[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

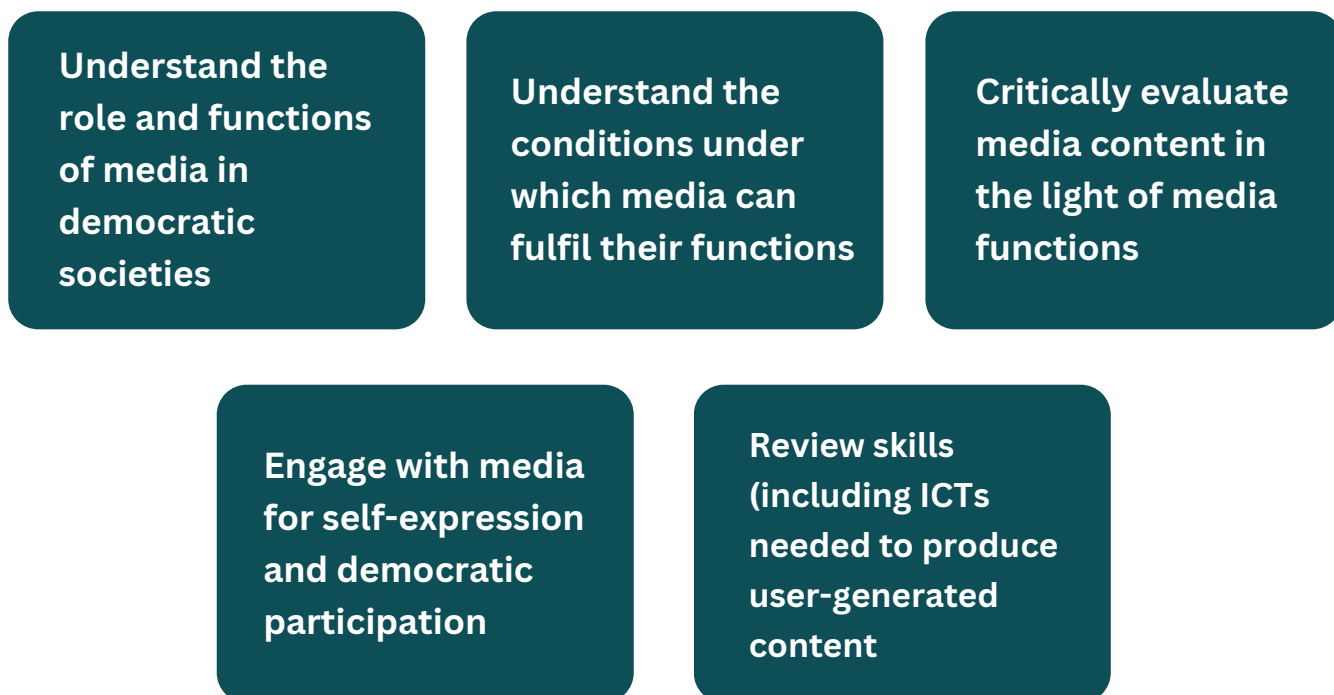
[4] Ibid.

Figure 1: Key Outcomes/Elements of Media and Information Literacy (UNESCO, 2013)

Information Literacy



Media Literacy:



The review of the literature reveals a broad debate regarding the relationship between media literacy and information literacy. There are essentially two opposing viewpoints on these two concepts: i) one that considers information literacy to be a broader field of study, within which media literacy is a subfield, and ii) the other that views information literacy as simply a part of the broader field of media literacy. However, UNESCO, through its group of international experts engaged in these matters, has concluded that despite the differences and similarities between these two concepts, there are close connections not only between media literacy and information literacy but also with other fields such as freedom of expression, news literacy, computer literacy, internet literacy, and digital literacy.[5]

European organizations such as the European Union (EU), the Council of Europe (CoE), and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) have also paid significant attention to issues of media and information literacy, which are examined in the following subsections of the report.

1.2. European Union (EU)

In recent years, the EU has taken several actions in this field, recognizing that “media literacy has never been more important than it is today”. [6]

In 2023, the European Commission published a media literacy guide to assist EU member states in reporting relevant activities related to media literacy and sharing best practices.[7] This guide references the 2021 Media Literacy Toolbox, prepared by the European Regulators Group for Audiovisual Media Services and the European Commission, aiming for the efficient and practical implementation of media literacy obligations by platforms that distribute video content. These efforts are intended to raise awareness among social media users and enhance their critical skills.[8] This signifies that the EU has developed legislative-supported mechanisms requiring content distribution platforms to implement

[5] Ibid, p. 19.

[6] European Commission. (21 shkurt 2023). [Commission publishes its media literacy guidelines](#).

[7] Ibid.

[8] European Regulators Group for Audiovisual Media Services. [Action Group on Media Literacy - ERGA Media Literacy Report: Recommendations for key principles, best practices and a Media Literacy Toolbox for Video-sharing Platforms](#).

effective media literacy tools and increase awareness among users browsing such materials.

Given that media literacy is closely intertwined with digital education, senior EU officials involved in technology and digitalization issues have raised concerns that “our generation and the younger internet users” lack adequate digital literacy. They emphasized that there is a significant shortage of digital skills across Europe, spanning various aspects of the digital realm, from using social media platforms to performing simple online searches.[9] This has likely been a dominant reason for developing the EU-level media literacy guide to assist member states in this regard. Media literacy not only impacts the education of new generations but also contributes to combating the spread of disinformation. [10]

Another significant initiative by the EU is the amendments made in 2018 to the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (Directive (EU) 2018/1808), with a particular focus on media literacy.[11] Article 33a of this directive states that EU member states will promote and take measures to develop media literacy skills and require member states to report to the European Commission every three years on the implementation of these measures.[12] Additionally, Article 28b of this directive outlines the obligations of video-sharing platforms to take measures concerning media literacy and to raise awareness among their users.[13]

Regarding the EU member states, media literacy is not typically a standalone subject in their educational systems, except for Luxembourg, which implements it as mandatory training. Some EU countries (Czech Republic, Denmark, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Malta, Poland, Cyprus, Spain, and Sweden) have combined media literacy with digital skills. In Estonia, media literacy is integrated into the "Digital Competence" subject, which includes information technology, information

[9] Viola, R. (February 21, 2023). Let's make Europe a stronghold of media literacy. Editorial by Roberto Viola, Director General for Communication Networks, Content and Technology at the European Commission, published on LinkedIn.

[10] Ibid.

[11] European Commission. (26 maj 2023). Media literacy.

[12] Directive 2018/1808. Directive (EU) 2018/1808 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 November 2018 amending Directive 2010/13/EU on the coordination of certain provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action in Member States concerning the provision of audiovisual media services (Audiovisual Media Services Directive) in view of changing market realities.

[13] Ibid.

literacy, online collaboration, digital content creation, online safety, and problem-solving. Meanwhile, Finland, known for its advanced pre-university education system, has incorporated media literacy into four different subjects: mathematics, history, art, and the Finnish language. On the other hand, other EU states such as France and Slovenia treat media and information literacy as an elective subject in their educational systems, although in Slovenia it is also covered in other subjects (native language and civic education).[14]

1.3. Council of Europe (CoE)

According to the Council of Europe's (CoE) perspective, Media and Information Literacy (MIL) is the primary tool for empowering citizens and societies to participate in and contribute to global knowledge. In line with this determination, the CoE considers the following aspects crucial: citizens should develop cognitive, technical, and social skills to enable effective access and critical analysis of media content; they should be informed about which media to use and how to use it; they should understand the ethical implications of media and new technologies, and they should develop effective communication skills, including the creation of media content. Moreover, the CoE's two main objectives in this regard are the inclusion of media and information literacy within institutional frameworks and the provision of tools to empower individual media users of all ages and backgrounds. Over the past two decades, the CoE has been engaged in publishing instruments, policies, studies, and activities aimed at improving media and information literacy in Europe. Additionally, the CoE's guidelines in this field are incorporated into many of its instruments, addressing states, policymakers, and both public and private actors responsible for the digital environment, in connection with areas such as education and lifelong learning, children and youth, media, and more.[15]

[14] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u0qPrMztMuU&t=4s>

[15] [Council of Europe. Media Literacy.](#)

2. ANALYSIS OF THE CONTEXT OF MEDIA LITERACY IN KOSOVO

This section of the report examines and analyzes the issue of media literacy in Kosovo, particularly from the perspective of pre-university public education (primary and secondary schools) in educating students on media literacy.

So far, there has been no comprehensive and sustainable initiative from Kosovo's public institutions to address media literacy as an urgent need for equipping students and younger generations with the skills to harness the benefits of technology and media, as well as to protect themselves from and prevent the threats and risks that may arise from them. Despite some efforts by the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation (MESTI) to address media literacy as a cross-curricular theme in various subjects, it has not yet become a priority for state institutions. The consequences of this could be multidimensional and unpredictable in the medium and long term, particularly for primary and secondary school students. Unlike educational institutions, in recent years in Kosovo, this issue has received more attention from non-institutional and non-governmental mechanisms based on goodwill initiatives, mainly from donors and various NGOs, through trainings, workshops, and other activities. However, for various reasons, even this approach is not being implemented in a systematic and sustainable way.

One of the most accurate indicators of the state of the education system, teaching, and learning in relation to critical thinking in primary and secondary schools over the past two decades is the 2022 PISA test, which yielded exceptionally poor results for Kosovan students. By assessing the competence of 15-year-old students in reading, mathematics, and science, PISA has ranked Kosovo 78th out of 80 participating countries, showing weak performance in all three areas – 76th in reading, 77th in science, and 74th in mathematics.[16] The PISA test measures students' abilities to solve complex problems, think critically, and communicate effectively. According to the results for Kosovo, it is evident that Kosovan students face significant challenges in acquiring these essential skills, with critical thinking being a particularly urgent area for intervention in

[16] Telegrafi. (December 2023). [Kosovo almost hits “rock bottom”, PISA test score published.](#)

pre-university education for younger generations.[17] The connection between the PISA test and media literacy in Kosovo lies in the report's observation that Kosovan students (aged 15) almost aren't capable of understanding long texts, dealing with abstract or counterintuitive concepts, and distinguishing between fact and opinion based on implied cues related to the content or source of information.[18]

The European Media literacy Index of 2023 also placed Kosovo at the bottom of the list regarding this subject. This index, developed by the Open Society Institute in Sofia, has measured media literacy in European countries since 2017 using various indicators, including the level of education, the state of the media, societal trust, and the use of new tools for participation.[19] The 2023 measurements show that Kosovo ranks second to last, 40th out of 41 European countries, with a score of just 21 points.[20] Only Georgia ranks lower, in the 41st position with 20 points. Other Western Balkan countries also do not fare well, though they are slightly higher than Kosovo (North Macedonia at 39th with 22 points, Albania at 38th with 23 points, Bosnia and Herzegovina at 37th with 24 points, Montenegro higher at 33rd with 32 points, and Serbia at 31st with 33 points). In contrast, Finland holds the top spot with 74 points, followed by Denmark (73 points), Norway (72 points), Estonia (71 points), Sweden (71 points), Ireland (70 points), and others.[21]

According to data from the Kosovo Agency of Statistics for 2023[22], approximately 98.06 percent of households had internet access during that year, indicating a very high percentage of internet accessibility and usage in Kosovo. The age group that uses the internet the most is 16-24 years old, comprising 21.5 percent of users, followed closely by the 25-34 age group at 21.4 percent. In contrast, the other four age groups use the internet less frequently, each accounting for 19 percent or less of users compared to the two primary age groups.[23] Official statistics reveal that citizens in Kosovo predominantly use mobile phones to access the internet, with 94.8 percent doing so. Other devices

[17] Interview with Muhamet Hajrullahu, Editor-in-Chief of Telegrafi. April 8, 2024.

[18] OECD. (2023). PISA 2022 Results: Factsheets – Kosovo, f. 3.

[19] Open Society Institute - Sofia. (June 2023). The Media Literacy Index 2023, f. 4.

[20] Ibid, p. 7.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Kosovo Agency of Statistics. (October 20, 2023). Results of the Survey on Use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Households 2023, p. 1.

[23] Ibid, p. 2.

are used far less frequently: laptops (22.1 percent), desktops (11.9 percent), and tablets (9.7 percent).[24] This statistic highlights the extensive penetration and widespread use of the internet in Kosovo, not only among adults but also among high school students (starting from the age of 16). These individuals are directly exposed to internet content by browsing various websites, particularly those created and shared on social media and online media platforms through mobile phones. This includes exposure to misinformation and fake news, which can now be easily created and disseminated via media channels.[25] The high penetration of the internet in Kosovo underscores the urgent need to prioritize media literacy by state institutions responsible for formulating and implementing educational policies in primary and secondary schools.

Despite the near-universal access, usage, and penetration of the internet in Kosovo, official data from the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI), published in the Education Strategy 2022-2026, reveal that educational and training institutions (IEAA)[26] in Kosovo lag significantly in terms of digitalization and the use of information technology for educational purposes. Out of a total of 1,058 public IEAA buildings in Kosovo, 705 (66.64 percent) have internet access, while 305 (33.36 percent) do not. Even though most school buildings in Kosovo have internet access, MESTI notes that in most cases, the internet is available only in specific personnel offices and possibly in ICT labs.[27] A more alarming issue is the number of computers. All public IEAA have only 9,138 computers, which translates to roughly one computer for every 35 students or 9,138 computers for 320,000 students in pre-university education. The situation is equally concerning regarding other equipment, such as projectors (1,753), digital screens (191), smart TVs (502), photocopiers (727), printers (851), tablets (247), scanners (11), etc.[28] These concerning data are from September 2021, as referenced in the Education Strategy, and it is unclear if there have been any improvements since then. The only official data indicate a decrease in the number of students in pre-university education—from approximately 320,000

[24] Ibid, p. 3.

[25] Interview with Muhamet Hajrullahu, Editor-in-Chief of Telegrafi. April 8, 2024.

[26] IEAA refers to kindergartens/nurseries, primary schools, lower secondary schools, upper secondary general schools (gymnasiums), upper secondary vocational schools, institutions offering adult education and training, etc.

[27] Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation. (2022). Education Strategy 2022-2026. Prishtina, p. 54.

[28] Ibid, p. 55.

students in September 2021 to 314,006 students in the 2023/2024 school year.[29] This further highlights that traditional and mechanical approaches to education, using outdated tools, still dominate in pre-university schools, without prioritizing digital technology to facilitate teaching and learning. [30]

2.1. Media Literacy in Pre-University Education in Kosovo

Since 2022, the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation (MESTI) has been working with the new Education Strategy 2022-2026, which is the primary document for the development of the education sector in Kosovo. The strategy encompasses five areas, with pre-university education being one of them. The document outlines five strategic objectives,[31] none of which specifically address media literacy. Although the fifth strategic objective, “use of digital technology to improve services and quality in education, in line with digital transformation trends,”[32] is related to media literacy, it is not directly mentioned.

Regarding the strategic objective of the Education Strategy for the use of digital technology in the education system, the document states that by 2026, efforts will be focused on five areas for the digitalization of the education system:[33]

- creating and operationalizing a comprehensive centralized digital platform for the education field;
- preparing and producing high-quality multidimensional digital teaching materials for different levels, grades, subjects, and types;
- providing educational institutions with quality internet networks and necessary technological devices;
- fostering digital competence among all parties involved in the education sector at all types and levels of educational institutions; and

[29] Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation. (Janar 2024). Statistical records: data on pre-university education 2023/24, p. 2.

[30] Intervistë me Dafina Jegenin, Gazetare në Klan Kosova / Mësimdhënëse e lëndës me zgjedhje “Edukimi Medial” në “Princeton School of Prishtina”. 19 prill 2024.

[31] Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation. (2022). Education Strategy 2022-2026. Prishtina, pp. 11-13.

[32] *ibid*, p. 13.

[33] *Ibid*.

- establishing institutional mechanisms enabling the realization of digitalization and technology utilization in the education sector.

Even though there is a direct or indirect connection between media literacy and the digitalization of the education system, the word "media" is mentioned only three times throughout the Education Strategy document. The most specific instance where the strategy addresses media literacy (though not by this specific name) is within the subsection "Digital Competence" (see p. 55 of the Education Strategy 2022-2026) concerning the digitalization of education.

Digital competence refers to the ability to use and interact confidently, critically, and responsibly with digital technologies for the purpose of learning, performing work tasks, and participating in society. Furthermore, digital competence encompasses understanding information and data, communication and collaboration, media literacy, digital content creation (including coding), security (including digital well-being and online safety), intellectual property issues, as well as problem-solving and critical and creative thinking.[34]

This definition of digital competence is broad and can imply many aspects, while "media literacy" is briefly mentioned among many other topics without further development as a concept and content tailored for children, students, and educators. However, through this strategic document, MESTI has assessed that Kosovo needs to invest in digital competence across categories of children, students, educators, and teachers at all levels of education,[35] thereby recognizing that it lags behind in terms of topics covered by digital competence, including media literacy. As measures to be taken for the development and cultivation of digital competence, MESTI has planned to officially adopt three foundational EU documents on digital competence in Kosovo: the European Framework for Digital Competence for Citizens (DigComp), for Educators (DigCompEdu), and for Educational Organizations (DigCompOrg).

2.1.1. Curriculum and Teaching Plans in Kosovo

In terms of pre-university education in Kosovo, the current curriculum and teaching programs in elementary and secondary schools (both lower and upper

[34] Ibid, p. 55.

[35] Ibid.

levels, as well as vocational schools) have never included nor currently feature a specific subject dedicated to media literacy. Consequently, media literacy is not mandatory for Kosovan students. This has been confirmed by senior officials from MESTI, who have noted that while there is no standalone subject for this topic, the current curriculum treats media literacy as an “interdisciplinary issue”.[36]

According to MESTI, which sets policies across all levels of education in Kosovo, the inclusion of media literacy in curricula and syllabi in an interdisciplinary form implies that all Kosovan educators must incorporate media literacy topics into their subjects, regardless of the subjects they teach to students, whether in social sciences or natural sciences. The integration of media literacy into the curriculum as an interdisciplinary issue, as explained by MESTI officials interviewed for this report, has resulted from aligning Kosovo’s educational policies with global standards. This approach is based on the United Nations’ call for sustainable development in education, among other things, promoting the continuous development of students’ media literacy and critical thinking skills through various subjects, rather than through any specific subject solely dedicated to these themes.[37]

Furthermore, MESTI has expressed opposition to establishing a separate subject solely for media literacy because, according to the Ministry, this would only “pigeonhole” media literacy, whereas the curriculum’s goal is to develop practical skills (rather than theoretical or abstract ones) in students regarding media literacy through various subjects, and consequently, also foster continuous critical thinking.

Even at the political level, specifically MESTI Minister Arbërie Nagavci, in her public statements, has not been in favor of including media literacy as a compulsory subject in primary and secondary schools in Kosovo.[38] Confirming that media literacy is integrated into other subjects in an interdisciplinary manner, as defined by the current curriculum, Minister Nagavci has expressed skepticism about including it as a separate subject for fear it could disrupt the balance of existing school subjects and due to demands to include other specific subjects apart from media literacy. Thus, there appears to be no political will for

[36] Interview with officials from the Division of Curriculum and Textbook Development at the Department of Pre-University Education Development of MESTI, April 2024.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Koha.Net. (July 18, 2022). [Nagavci: Kosovo must advance in the digital literacy context](#).

curriculum changes in primary and secondary schools aimed at incorporating media literacy as a specific school subject. As a solution, Minister Nagavci has mentioned that "there are different subjects where there are specific units addressing media literacy" and that it is included in elective subjects across schools, specifically in "Language and Literature" and "Civic Education".[39] While there is no official data on the effects of media literacy as an interdisciplinary issue, one of the main criticisms from media literacy experts, journalists, and civil society activists is that treating media literacy in pre-university education only as an interdisciplinary topic is inadequate. They suggest that this cannot in any way replace media literacy as a separate compulsory subject for all pre-university educational institutions.

According to them, the continuous exclusion of media literacy by MESTI from the curriculum and teaching plans as a separate and compulsory subject reflects an institutional unwillingness to seriously address and fundamentally engage with media literacy to foster critical thinking among students.[40] Media literacy experts in Kosovo criticize that the main reasons for MESTI's refusal to include media literacy as a separate subject are: i) since the decision falls within the political level, political stakeholders (including MESTI) are not interested in developing students' knowledge and skills in media literacy and critical thinking because they aim to exploit youth for internal political consumption,[41] and ii) curriculum changes could potentially introduce new issues outside of media literacy, necessitating the inclusion of new regular subjects.[42] However, various non-governmental organizations and international organizations in Kosovo (such as the OSCE Mission in Kosovo) consistently advocate for the integration of media literacy as a separate subject into the regular teaching process.[43]

Experts in pedagogical issues and pre-university education suggest that integrating media literacy would require systematic training and capacity building for young teachers. This would entail a significant commitment from MESTI and other educational institutions to adequately qualify teaching staff in

[39] OSCE Mission in Kosovo. (7 tetor 2022). "EduMedia", Episode 6 - The need for the inclusion of Media Literacy in schools.

[40] Interview with Arben Hajredinaj, Head of the Media Section of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo. April 15, 2024.

[41] Interview with Alban Zeneli, Assistant Professor at the Department of Journalism, Faculty of Philology at the University of Prishtina. June 3, 2024.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Interview with Arben Hajredinaj, Head of the Media Section of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo. April 15, 2024.

media literacy.[44] However, there has been a lack of serious and concrete movement in this direction. Furthermore, MESTI is criticized for lagging behind in keeping up with trends in information technology and the digitalization of the teaching and learning process, essential prerequisites for adapting to modern educational conditions.[45] In addition, there is a strong demand for media literacy to become a regular subject in the education system to raise students' awareness about the positive and negative effects of not only traditional media (online and social media) but also in combination with digital technologies, addressing the growing risks of artificial intelligence and other forms of digitalization.[46]

Although not an obligatory subject in primary and secondary school institutions in Kosovo, media literacy is offered as an elective subject or elective course in some schools, primarily at the secondary level. Elective courses imply that teachers, in collaboration with school institutions and Municipal Education Directorates, have the right, under the current curriculum, to include various elective subjects in the teaching program.[47] This is a competence of municipalities and operates in such a way that schools propose the teaching program for elective subjects according to their needs, apply to municipalities, and municipalities create a commission to evaluate the proposed programs by schools. After approval, the municipality decides on the designation of the elective subject.

Furthermore, after schools offer elective courses, students can choose which elective subjects they are more interested in continuing during an academic year.[48] However, the number of schools and teachers offering media literacy as an elective subject, as well as the number of students who have taken media literacy as an elective course, is unknown. A key challenge regarding elective teaching/subjects lies in the fact that teachers bear the entire burden and responsibility for preparing teaching texts and materials during class hours,

[44] Interview with Rinor Qehaja, Executive Director of the EdGuard Institute. April 11, 2024.

[45] Interview with Dafina Jegeni, Journalist at Klan Kosova / Teacher of the elective course "Media Education" at Princeton School of Prishtina". April 19, 2024.

[46] Interview with Muhamet Hajrullahu, Editor-in-Chief of Telegrafi. April 8, 2024.

[47] Interview with officials from the Division of Curriculum and Textbook Development at the Department of Pre-University Education Development of MESTI, April 2024.

[48] Ibid.

which also entails financial costs in addition to content-related aspects.[49] Regarding textbooks, the OSCE Mission in Kosovo distributed 400 copies of media literacy textbooks to teachers and students in Albanian, and 300 other textbooks to teachers and students of minority communities in Serbian, Turkish, and Roma languages during the period 2016-2022.[50] As a result of OSCE's work in Kosovo, three primary and secondary schools in the country have included media and information education as elective subjects.[51]

Meanwhile, the implementation process of the curriculum itself poses challenges, some of which are examined in this section of the report. One of these challenges is the adequacy of teachers with the teaching curriculum and their understanding of it, especially concerning cross-curricular issues such as media literacy. According to the curriculum, every teacher is required to address media literacy based on their subjects, but the extent of integrating media literacy as a cross-curricular theme remains at the discretion of the teachers, according to MESTI.[52] Currently, it is unknown in what form media literacy is integrated into different teaching subjects.[53] Therefore, the implementation of the curriculum by schools and particularly by teachers presents another issue for which there is a lack of information and empirical data. The capacities in Kosovo's educational institutions related to media literacy are also unknown, specifically how well-prepared teachers of different subjects are for media literacy topics. This is because their primary focus is not media literacy, knowing that many of them come from other fields of teaching such as mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, which differ greatly from social sciences like Albanian language, sociology, philosophy, history, and other social subjects related to media literacy. Experts in media literacy who have trained pre-university teachers have found that, with few exceptions, teachers lack the necessary skills for media literacy to effectively transfer this knowledge to students in this field.[54] Given that the teaching approach for many teachers in Kosovo is mechanical and

[49] Interview with Kushtrim Bektashi, Elective Course Teacher of “Media Literacy” at Sami Frashëri Gymnasium in Pristina. April 20, 2024.

[50] OSCE Mission in Kosovo. [Media and information literacy initiatives](#).

[51] Ibid.

[52] Interview with officials from the Division of Curriculum and Textbook Development at the Department of Pre-University Education Development within MESTI, April 2024.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Interview with Alban Zeneli, Assistant Professor at the Department of Journalism, Faculty of Philology at the University of Prishtina. June 3, 2024.

traditional,[55] integrating teaching subjects in a cross-curricular form with media literacy and critical thinking requires engagement, as well as greater investment from MESTI and other educational institutions to raise the quality of teaching in implementing the curriculum.

For assessing the implementation of the curriculum, systematic and continuous monitoring of teaching is essential from the relevant mechanisms. MESTI has noted that it is still early to evaluate the curriculum's implementation since it has been less than two years since its introduction.[56] Monitoring is conducted by the Education Inspectorate, which operates directly under the Ministry of MESTI, functioning centrally in Pristina and in the regions of Kosovo (Pristina, Prizren, Ferizaj, Mitrovica, Peja, Gjilan, and Gjakova).[57] While there is no data on the level of implementation of media literacy in Kosovo's schools as a cross-curricular issue, responsibility for monitoring the curriculum's implementation lies with both school directors and Municipal Directorates of Education. It is unclear what activities these mechanisms have undertaken to supervise teachers' implementation of media literacy as a cross-curricular issue and how effective they are in monitoring teaching in primary and secondary schools. Additionally, the Education Strategy confirms serious issues regarding the effectiveness of educational oversight bodies, acknowledging that the primary weakness in pre-university education is ensuring quality.[58]

2.1.2. Teacher Training for Media Literacy

Another important component are the trainings organized on media literacy topics, primarily by non-governmental organizations and international organizations in Kosovo. These trainings aim to professionally equip Kosovan teachers in media literacy to apply the knowledge gained during training sessions in their teaching practices and to transmit it to their students. MESTI, as

[55] Interview with Dafina Jegeni, Journalist at Klan Kosova / Teacher of the elective course "Media Education" at Princeton School of Prishtina". April 19, 2024.

[56] Interview with officials from the Division of Curriculum and Textbook Development at the Department of Pre-University Education Development of MESTI, April 2024.

[57] Law No. 06/L-046 on the Education Inspectorate of the Republic of Kosovo.

[58] Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation. (2022). Education Strategy 2022-2026. Prishtina, p. 64.

part of its teacher training activities, issues open calls, and organizations aiming to conduct such trainings must apply through these calls with their training programs, which need approval from MESTI for teacher training purposes.[59]

The organizations whose programs have been approved for organizing trainings in the field of media literacy for teachers are the Kosovo Education Center (KEC) and the United Union of Education, Science and Technology (SBASHK). During the years 2018-2023, SBASHK has trained 3,500 pre-university education teachers in Kosovo (primary and secondary schools) on their skills regarding the role of media, democratization, misinformation, disinformation, media malfunctions, and media literacy.[60]

Previously, such trainings have also been conducted by non-governmental organizations (Dokufest, IPKO, etc.) as well as international organizations in Kosovo, such as UNICEF and the OSCE Mission in Kosovo. The latter (OSCE), during the years 2016-2022, trained 70 secondary school teachers on media literacy concepts and organized lectures for 450 students from 22 secondary schools on media literacy, digital media, and information.[61]

Meanwhile, MESTI offers two types of training programs:[62]

1. Foundational training programs directly integrated with teaching.
2. Supplementary training programs, which include, among others, training sessions for teachers on media literacy.

The main difference between these two programs lies in the fact that foundational teaching programs have a longer duration and more hours because they are directly integrated with existing subjects (such as language, mathematics, and so on). On the other hand, supplementary training programs are dedicated to cross-curricular topics like media literacy. This means that supplementary programs have a shorter duration and fewer hours of training because media literacy is not a standalone subject in the curriculum but is

[59] Interview with officials from the Division of Curriculum and Textbook Development at the Department of Pre-University Education Development of MESTI, April 2024.

[60] Interview with Alban Zeneli, Assistant Professor at the Department of Journalism, Faculty of Philology at the University of Prishtina. 3 June 2024.

[61] OSCE Mission in Kosovo. [Media and information literacy initiatives](#).

[62] [Interview with officials from the Division of Curriculum and Textbook Development at the Department of Pre-University Education Development of MESTI, April 2024.](#)

treated only as a cross-curricular theme. According to MESTI officials, training for media literacy typically lasts around 20 hours on average and not more than three days (approximately 6 hours per day).[63] This indicates that media literacy is secondary, with training in this field being purely supplementary, lacking proper attention and priority considering current trends in the field.

Another challenge, particularly concerning these trainings, especially those organized for media literacy, is securing funding for their implementation. Specifically, implementing training programs is difficult due to the funding constraints. Given that the training programs approved by MESTI for media literacy are primarily organized by non-governmental organizations, and MESTI does not provide financial support for them, these organizations rely on foreign donors to finance activities related to organizing training for teachers on media literacy.[64] In this case, if non-governmental organizations fail to secure financial sustainability for training activities, the training programs cannot be implemented. Worse still, teacher training for media literacy may not be conducted at all, despite being approved by MESTI.[65] On the other hand, despite MESTI's budget for 2024 being over 100 million euros (100,120,951 euros), only about 0.4% of this budget, or 393,747 euros, is allocated to the "Teacher Training" budget line, with no clear indication of how exactly this budget will be spent. Furthermore, Law No. 08/L-260 on budget allocations for the Budget of the Republic of Kosovo for 2024, does not specify where this budget dedicated to "teacher training" will be allocated. [66]

When it comes to the knowledge gained by teachers from these trainings, a challenging aspect remains the supervision of teachers regarding the application of their knowledge to students in the field of media literacy. The easiest approach seems to be establishing communication bridges between school administrations to oversee teachers in raising student awareness about media literacy from these training programs. However, there is no verified data or information on whether this happens and if there is any assessment of the impact of these training programs on the teaching and learning process. Data from MESTI suggests that younger teachers are more prepared and interested in professional development for media literacy, information technology, and

[63] Ibid.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Law No. 08/L-260 on budget allocations for the Budget of the Republic of Kosovo for the year 2024.

digitalization in general. Meanwhile, teachers over the age of 55 show reluctance, particularly in technology, information access, and there are cases where they resist reform efforts.

In addition to teacher training, non-governmental organizations, in collaboration with university institutions and international organizations, supported by the community of foreign donors, organize various training sessions for young people on various aspects of media literacy. Through these initiatives, these organizations consistently contribute significantly to the training of youth, including high school students and Kosovan students, on the importance of media literacy, combating fake news, information technology, digital literacy, and more. These trainings are independently conducted by civil society organizations, although they lack sustainability as they depend on financial support from foreign donors for various topics related to media literacy.

RECOMMENDATION

- MESTI should engage experts to develop a specialized curriculum for media literacy, which can then serve as the foundation for updating and revising existing curricula and teaching plans.
- MESTI should prioritize and urgently address the issue of media literacy in primary and secondary schools through one of these two options:
 - i) Option 1: Update/revise the current curriculum and teaching plans to include media literacy as a separate mandatory subject at all pre-university education levels, aiming to equip students with media literacy skills; or
 - ii) Option 2: In case of lack of political and institutional will to update/revise the curriculum, then review textbooks and instructional materials to integrate media literacy as a cross-curricular topic across all subjects, allocating more class hours specifically for teaching media literacy and critical thinking. This would ensure (at least nominally) the implementation of the current educational curriculum to address media literacy as a cross-curricular theme in the teaching process at primary and secondary schools in Kosovo. Provide guidelines on how to integrate media literacy topics cross-curricularly into regular subjects to facilitate interaction between subjects and make teaching hours more engaging for students.
- MESTI should take on the responsibilities necessary to advance media literacy and coordinate initiatives aimed at consolidating media literacy and fully integrating it into pre-university education through defined timelines for achieving concrete results.
- MESTI should engage experts to develop school textbooks for students and teachers on media literacy.
- MESTI should seek maximum engagement from the Department of Journalism within the Faculty of Philology at the University of Prishtina to develop media literacy as a subject in pre-university education and expand it

to other public universities. Additionally, efforts should be made to strengthen the Faculty of Education at the University of Prishtina to equip new generations of teachers with media literacy skills.

- MESTI should seriously reconsider the need to develop a strategy for media literacy and assess the progress of earlier initiatives to draft such a strategic document. The current education strategy inadequately addresses the issue of media literacy within the digitalization framework, handling it superficially and insufficiently. Therefore, this issue should be addressed through a national strategy with a concrete action plan.
- Greater support and encouragement should be given to elective teaching of media literacy in Kosovo's primary and secondary schools, even if there is no willingness to make media literacy compulsory. Additionally, teaching materials for media literacy should be standardized as an elective subject to relieve teachers of this burden and avoid improvisation in this area, which would primarily impact students.
- MESTI should lead the process of assessing the needs of pre-university schools in Kosovo for media literacy, identify challenges regarding the professional capacities of teachers in media literacy, and evaluate their knowledge to integrate media literacy into their subjects as an interdisciplinary theme. This would pave the way for developing specific training programs for teachers on this topic with mandatory levels of proficiency. Without information on the technical-professional needs of school institutions, current training sessions could easily prove ineffective and have minimal impact on students regarding the importance of media literacy, information, and critical thinking in general.
- MESTI should actively engage in training teachers for media literacy. MESTI, as the bearer of educational policies in the country, should lead this process and not treat media literacy training for teachers as supplementary or secondary programs, but with high priority. Moreover, this process should be institutionally led and not solely reliant on non-governmental sector organizations, which are not financially supported by MESTI and depend entirely on foreign donors for implementing training programs. Additionally, MESTI, in collaboration with the Faculty of Education and the Department of Journalism at the University of Prishtina, as well as with the non-governmental sector (NGOs, media, experts, etc.), should develop training programs aimed at the professional development of teachers in primary and

secondary schools in the field of media literacy. These trainings should be long-term in terms of duration, sustainable in terms of content, and financially supported through a dedicated budget line by MESTI to ensure the quality of teachers on media literacy topics.

- Existing oversight mechanisms should be strengthened, or new mechanisms should be created as needed, whose function should not only be technical supervision but also professional oversight:
 - i) Continuous monitoring of the implementation of the curriculum and teaching plans by teachers regarding media literacy as an intercurricular topic,
 - ii) Monitoring of the professional knowledge gained by teachers during training and the transmission of that knowledge to students, and
 - iii) These oversight mechanisms should report to the Government of Kosovo / MESTI and the Assembly of Kosovo (relevant parliamentary committee on education) every six months or once a year regarding the results of monitoring pre-university education in Kosovo. This is essential for raising students' awareness about media literacy, critical thinking, digitalization, benefits, risks from digital technology, etc.
- The Education Strategy 2022-2026 should be fully implemented for the digitalization of the pre-university education system and capacities within schools should be developed to facilitate interaction between digital technology and media literacy. This will enable greater awareness among students about the positive and negative effects of media roles, information, and digital technology as a result of rapid developments in digital technology.
- MESTI should seriously consider and address the observations and suggestions from non-governmental organizations, experts in media literacy, information, and informational technology to prioritize this topic in pre-university education. There should be extensive interaction and exchanges between school institutions and the non-governmental sector engaged in media literacy and informational technology to enhance students' awareness of the effects of media literacy, information, and digitalization through various forms such as lectures, different simulations, practical work, and group activities.

- MESTI should further diversify its active local and international partners, including media institutions such as the Independent Media Commission (which, under the new law, will have responsibilities for media literacy), the Press Council of Kosovo (which could take on additional responsibilities for media literacy), the Association of Journalists of Kosovo, to enhance the dynamism in combating misinformation through media literacy activities, and other civil society organizations in Kosovo.

