The Significance of Digital and Media Literacy in the Covid-19 Period

Dr. Aylin KIRIŞÇI SARIKAYA

Ministry of National Education

aylinkirisci@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0001-7443-8433

Abstract

Education systems and teachers should transform and equip technology to be more resilient and adaptive to the new order after the Covid-19 pandemic. Teachers need support in this aspect. Teachers should be media and digitally literate as they should know to use mass media sources, from print to video and the internet. This study aims to reveal teachers' views on digital and media literacy.

The research is a qualitative descriptive study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six teachers, and data were analyzed with the content analysis method. Six themes emerged: the definition of media and digital literacy, media availability and usage, critical understanding, communicative abilities, participation and content creation, media literacy education, and media literacy as a school subject. The findings reveal that the interviewed teachers were all aware of the media and digital literacy concept. They were media and digital literate to a certain level. They mostly thought of traditional media tools when talking about media literacy. They did not participate or create content in new media. And they agreed on the importance of media literacy education and the necessity of media literacy content in certain school subjects. Conclusions might recommend that the media and digital literacy course could be obligatory during undergraduate education. Teachers who have not taken any training in their undergraduate years about the subject could have in-service opportunities.

Keywords: Digital and media literacy, New media literacies, Teacher education, Professional development, Qualitative research

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic hindered all face-to-face teaching and learning activities, and the only way that teachers met their students happened to be virtual. According to UNESCO 2020 data, 1.6 billion students fell into an unexpected situation with the outbreak of Covid-19 (UN, 2020). One of the measures for public health during the pandemic process was to take a break from face-to-face education. The costs are tremendous in terms of learning losses, school dropouts, and health and well-being (UNESCO, 2022). In a short time to compensate for education interruption, emergency remote learning started nearly all over the world (Bozkurt, 2020). In Turkey, schools were closed for 49 weeks during the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 education years. Thanks to health and safety precautions and vaccination, schools have reopened.

Teachers' proficiency in using technology has come to the fore much more today. Because of the online instruction provided during the COVID-19 pandemic, their digital learning has advanced. We encounter effective use of information and communication technologies within the scope of the Managing the Teaching and Learning Process competency of the Ministry of Education (MEB, 2020). This competency is directly related to the use of

technology and the digital world by teachers. Education systems should transform and equip technology to be more resilient and adaptive to the new order, and teachers need to be supported in this aspect. A significant shift in teachers' digital literacy is also necessary for the efficient use of digital technologies in classrooms (Li & Yu, 2022). In addition, teachers should be media literate as they should know to use mass media sources, from print to video and the internet, appropriately and reflectively.

In the 21st century, human beings live with science and technology perhaps twice as much as they lived in the previous century. Media consumption is changing through the availability of digital products to user generated communication. European Commission (EC) recently proposed a declaration on digital rights and media policies that empower European citizens and let them access any content in anywhere in Europe (Celot, 2015; European Commision, 2022). Fostering participation in the digital public space is one of the key principles of this declaration (EC, 2022). Being media literate gives some rights and responsibilities to the citizens and asks them to be critically engaged in the world. Thus, for educators, it is crucial to know these rights and responsibilities so that they could help the students and the community become media literate, in other words, good explorers and communicators of knowledge, and more informed and engaged citizens. In a nutshell, teachers play a crucial role in shaping societies. They teach, guide, and train future generations. Therefore, we should listen to them and learn their views on digital and media literacy. Thus, this study aims to reveal the teachers' views on digital and media literacy. Previous studies mostly focused on children's and teenagers' media and digital literacies, and the pedagogy of media and digital literacy aimed at them (Livingstone, Van Couvering, & Thumim, 2005; Rasi, Vuojärvi & Ruokamo, 2019). Therefore, this study could contribute to the field.

Media literacy in the past was concerned with how people give and get meaning from media, like advertisements, TV, newspapers, and the internet. Media literacy is not limited to how people give and get meaning from media but also intervenes in such matters by studying how people can be made more "critical" or "reflective" about the sorts of meanings they give and get from media (Gee, 2015). Therefore, being media literate becomes vitally important. As Zylka et al. (2011) state, media literacy terminology is inconsistent and varies from nation to nation. The expressions "media literacy" and "media literacy education" are often used in the United States. Canada focuses on digital literacy (Media Smarts, 2010), and in Germany, the term "media competencies" is common.

These differences in terminology create various understandings and conceptual meanings. For instance, media literacy could be regarded as traditional and new media together. Compared to digital literacy, which is just applicable to digital media, media literacy incorporates a far more comprehensive approach. Because of this, many nations have similar discussions about media education, whether they are realizing and using it or not (Zylka et al. 2011). As a result, many countries are trying to develop a uniform understanding and terminology in this field.

Media literacy is sometimes interchangeably used with digital literacy. However, it is much broader, and it encompasses digital literacy. Media literacy is regarded as an umbrella term, and it is the fluency in fields such as (Lee, 2016 as cited in Cicha and others, 2021):

- *Understanding the nature and functioning of the media industry and the characteristics of the media;*
- *Ability to analyze the media;*
- *Creative expression;*
- *Ability to monitor and criticize the media;*
- *Constructive application in everyday life of what the media has taught.*

In 1997, Gilster coined the phrase "digital literacy," which was defined as the capacity to comprehend and utilize information delivered via computers and the internet (Cicha, et.al., 2021; Spante, et al. 2018). Ribble (2011) stated that digital literacy covers the use of technology and technology-related learning and teaching processes. It encompasses reaching correct information, using information, sharing, and transferring information, and producing information by using devices such as computers, tablets and smart phones.

Media Literacy Courses in Turkish Education System

The number of media literacy courses and scope of courses related to media literacy have significantly grown in the last years. This has especially been the case within secondary schools, where media literacy is often incorporated into elective classes. Additionally, there has been a dramatic and important growth of scholarly research regarding media literacy education at the K-12 level. In Turkey, though it is a new phenomenon, the media literacy lesson took part in the secondary school curriculum as an elective course all over the country in 2007; and similar to the world, there are academic research on K12 media literacy competences (e.g. Aktı, 2011; Aydemir, 2013; Çetinkaya, 2008; Çiçek, 2013; Sur, 2012; Tüzel, 2012). The Ministry of

National Education executed the Media Literacy Course Teaching Program in 2018. This program expressed the curriculum, media literacy field knowledge, principles, and media diversity (MEB, 2018). It is for 7th and 8th graders. And it would be beneficial in terms of expanding competencies and specifying the values of the course.

Method

Research Design

The research is a qualitative descriptive study. Qualitative research uses authentic and context-specific settings to understand the phenomenon (Patton, 2002). In qualitative descriptive research, there is an in-depth summary of specific experiences of people or groups of people in their natural state (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). It is a less theoretical approach compared to other qualitative studies (Sandelowski, 2010) and it is generally used in healthcare and nursing research. The qualitative descriptive study is favorable if the researcher desires to feel free to stop to follow or change the framework that she commits at the beginning (Sandelowski, 2010). I utilized qualitative descriptive research because I tried to reveal a detailed description of teacher views about media and digital literacies through low-inference interpretations (Neergaard et al., 2009; Sandelowski, 2010) and not being committed to a specific framework.

Research Participants

The qualitative descriptive study generally replies to questions, such as what, when, where, and who. The samples for qualitative inquiry are selected purposefully to yield information-rich cases (Patton, 2002). Accordingly, the participants were in line with the purposeful sampling strategy. They were secondary school teachers whose subject matter was related to media, communication, and technology. I utilized snowball sampling technique.

Research Instrument and Procedure

I conducted 20-25 min. semi-structured interviews. Credibility, confirmability, consistency, and transferability are crucial criteria in qualitative studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure credibility, I introduced myself and tried to build a comfy and trusting environment for the participants. I also shared participant information and the approval form to get participants' consent. Interview questions were checked by two Doctors of Education and rewritten according to their comments. Confirmability of the study was tried to be ensured with an expert check during the data analysis process, too. The raw data and the demographics of the participants were written to provide transferability.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed with the content analysis method to identify core consistencies. The content analysis concerned with meanings, content, understandings, and intentions is one of the most valuable analysis methods in qualitative studies (Krippendorff, 2004). Inductive analysis was carried out by starting from codes to categories and categories to themes.
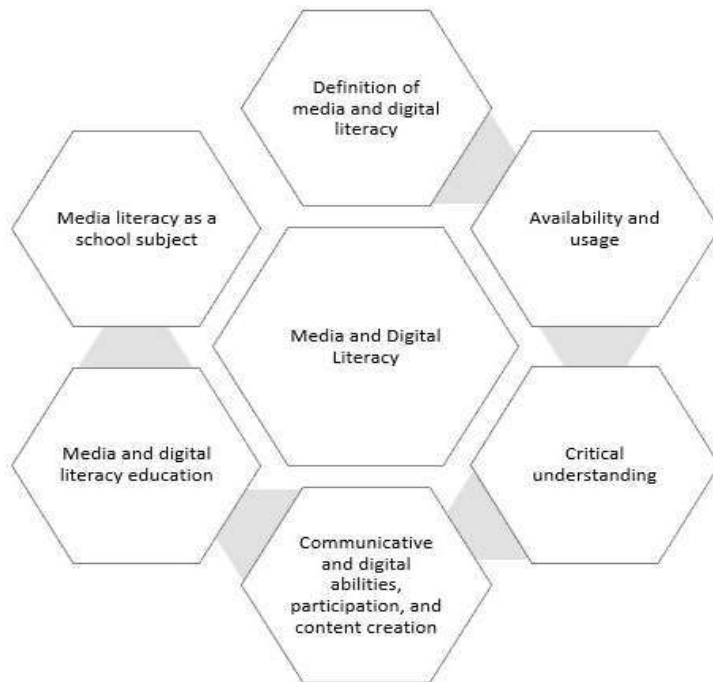
The Results

Data analysis revealed rich information on the ideas of teachers on media literacy. Six teachers interviewed showed that teachers are mostly media literate, and they are cognizant of the importance of media literacy. The demographical information about the participants are as follows:

Table 1

Demographic Information

Name	Gender	Age	Work experience (year)	Subject Matter Specialization
Orhan	M	38	14	Social Sciences
Meltem	F	35	13	Social Sciences
Mustafa	M	32	6	Technology and Design
Özge	F	41	17	Turkish
İbrahim	M	24	2	Turkish
Aslı	F	34	10	Science and Technology

The quotations from participants were reported verbatim. The findings are structured around the emergent key themes. There are six themes accordingly: 1) Definition of media and media literacy, 2) Media availability and usage, 3) Critical understanding, 4) Communicative abilities, participation, and content creation, 5) Media literacy education, and 6) Media literacy as a school subject.

Figure 1

The Themes

Definition of Media and Digital Literacy

According to the results, all the teachers have got some notion about media and digital literacy; and they care about the concepts.

> *When I say media, the first thing that comes to mind is television. The media is very much in the lives of children. Adults can choose, that is our group, but children take what they give. Media literate is a person who can get some facts in the media through his filter. The person who took off the blinders. He must try to see the big picture. Access to correct information. Digital literacy is the usage of technology, how to use IT, digital responsibility. Both concepts are close to each other.* (Mustafa)

> *All media, that is, press and broadcasting organizations, are printed or visual. I think everything we follow from the press, television, and internet. It is to follow and interpret them. And digital literacy is about how we use them.* (Aslı)

Availability and Usage

Media and digital sources are all available to all the teachers, though they mostly talk about TV, newspaper, and internet as media channels. They rarely go to theatre, and sometimes to cinema. They all have got mobile phone, PC and internet connection at their homes.

*I mostly watch TV to get news and information, however, I do not follow as much as in the past. I think they are not objective, mostly biased… Newspaper, I don't read newspapers, I do not like. I can only follow visuals... I use Instagram a lot, ... I don't use Twitter at all. Especially because it is a tool for political things, I don't look at it not because I despise it, but because it is biased, for example, for both sides. (*Mustafa)

I don't follow anything on social media. I used to have accounts, but now I froze them. I don't enjoy it much, it's my own choice. I think people use it a little wrong. I think it's too much of a show-off part. I don't use it for it. (İbrahim)

Critical Understanding

The power of media, its partnerships with other actors, and its transformational power are realized and known by all the interviewed teachers. They can understand media content. They have found some trajectories to reach the reliable sources of information and news. But they are worried about the general community and their students.

I prefer to watch from several channels. I usually watch the news from two or three channels. So I can hear different comments. It is to be more objective. I think many TV channels are biased, which is a problem. It misleads society. For example, there are channels close to the government. I am against everything that is not objective, especially in the news… Some people know this, but others still watch their channel and believe what it announces. People think that they are watching the right channel, they do not listen to different comments (Meltem*)*

I read different newspapers. I wonder both those who write in parallel, in line with my ideas and those who have opposite thoughts and how they write. (İbrahim*)*

The participants are also cognizant of the influences of advertisements. They said they did not buy anything which are not necessary.

I'm not too impressed with the ads. I get what I need. There are some things I know. I don't buy anything just because it's advertised as good. (Orhan)

If I like it and it is what I need, yes, advertising guides me, but I do not get influenced too much. The media does it wrong, of course… We are like a cog in a big wheel, some things serve that purpose as if we were the market of developed countries. By pumping consumption, people can directly buy it. For example, a person who earns 1000 TL can go and buy a phone for 2000 TL. He is affected by TV series and advertisements. So very effective. Young people are much more affected by them. (Özge)

Communicative and Digital Abilities, Participation and Content Creation

Communicative abilities are an individual's capacity to establish social relations through media and maintaining networks. They are like complete engagement with the media. Participating in the public sphere and content creation is the highest level of media literacy. Message creation is a way of active citizenship.

Three of the interviewed teachers (Özge, İbrahim, and Orhan) do not use media as a means of communication and they do not participate. All the teachers except one (Aslı) are reluctant and hesitant to share their ideas about political and social events.

I do not comment on things on social media. I guess I would not do it even if I had accounts. I don't need it, there is plus a risk. I don't feel any need to comment... It is a risk, I don't know, it's a political risk. I am a civil servant; this may take attention among friends. I might write something negative, it might be recorded digitally, so why should I? So I didn't do... I never participated in signature campaigns either. (İbrahim)

If it's social, it's okay to share something on social media, but sharing something personal doesn't interest me that much. I've never been in the limelight; I didn't tell my thoughts… I don't participate in signature campaigns either. You might think of it as self-assurance, I've never participated. Does it give me a headache afterward? Being a civil servant and personality features affect this. (Özge)

My social media and Facebook posts are mostly about private life, I make emotional posts. I mean, I share music, painting, things that I love and express my feelings… I don't share anything political on Facebook. Absolutely not… For the sake of being impartial, maybe I have a fear that my friends won't understand me. Otherwise, I don't want him to break his friendship with me because I think about something, not because I break them. Since I am a teacher, there is a sense of neutrality, but I already have a sense of being neutral personally. I don't want to share my political views. (Mustafa)

Only Aslı stated that she participated and shared her ideas on the internet. However, she is also hesitant to share or write something political.

I can also get news from Facebook. There are signature campaigns, I agree... I repost if I am in the same direction. I can write under an image, connecting it to something I've read. Not too biased, not too political. I try to spread my thoughts in the form of slogans and messages in my own way… Trying to remain neutral, because deciphering people is not nice. I don't want to be seen as biased. I do not want them to put me in a class, so those who know me know about

me. I do not highlight this in my posts. I don't like the alienation thing... I don't hesitate because I am a civil servant. I think this is secondary. (Aslı)

Media and Digital Literacy Education

All the teachers said that they did not have any formal media or digital literacy education both at university and as in-service training. Their knowledge about the subject comes from their daily experience or personal interests.

I didn't get any media or digital education. I can't clearly remember right now. But I have studied theater myself. It is also a visual thing. And some of the instructors I worked with were related to the media. So, I saw the function of the media. The theater is something that has shaped public opinion since ancient times. Satire management criticism in the theater, the state of society is beginning to emerge. Art is for society. (Meltem)

I didn't get any education about the media. But we had drawing lessons on visual media. Why that visual color is used, what is the effect. Maybe these will help me to make some inferences, I can question the reason… I noticed them from my own experience. (Mustafa)

İbrahim said that there was an elective media literacy course when he was a student at the education faculty. He did not select it and as far as he remembers the course could not be realized that year as there were not enough participants.

We had a course at the university, as an elective. But nobody chose that year. Of course, it would be good if it opened… I didn't choose media literacy; I chose drama instead. (İbrahim)

Media Literacy as a School Subject

All the teachers agreed on the importance and the necessity of the media literacy course or content in schools. Aslı, Özge, Meltem, and Orhan also talked about their anxiety about future generations.

*People are sleeping. They are not conscious enough. I try to create as much as I know in my course... I would like to increase my knowledge of this subject. I think media literacy could even be a compulsory subject. There could be at least a must module for children. Our teens are raised as a community of non-interpreting people. (*Aslı)

Students need to be made aware of this issue. Maybe this awareness should again be through the media. At the beginning of the conversation, I could not express this need, but now that I think about it, yes, it is needed. This need seems to be increasing day by day according

*to the conditions of the day. Communication skills could be in the curriculum of Turkish lessons. In literature, there is art for society and art for art. I always think that art is for the community. The media is very effective it changes perceptions. (*Özge)

There even has internet syndrome. This year, something like this is in the Social Studies book, probably in the 7th grade. Internet syndrome is very common in China. The current generation is in danger. It seems that staying on the internet excessively will bring along many problems. It has moral, mental, and physical harm. Media literacy is also substantial for this. (Orhan)

Only one of the teachers (Meltem) had given media literacy course before. Meltem said the course was boring as the students did not have any course books. She talked about shortfalls about the course.

I taught media literacy. I didn't give this course because I had an education on this subject. The students did not have a book, only a guidebook. We were reading from there, and we were discussing. It was a bit boring…. In general, we talked with the pupils about what they watched and the TV series they watched. The lesson could have been useful if children had books in the first place. This course could be useful for children with low critical eye awareness. (Meltem)

Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

Discussion

Based on these findings, we can say that the interviewed teachers are media and digital literate to a certain level. However, they mostly thought of traditional media tools when talking about media literacy. In their research Çizmeci and Köse (2021) quantitatively analyzed new media literacy level of teachers and found that teachers with graduate level education had more developed media literacy skills. Similarly, Korkmaz (2020) and Öçal (2017) found graduate level of education made significant difference in digital literacy. We could infer that further education or trainings could contribute teachers' media and digital literacies.

According to the participants, teachers cannot practice participation and content creation in new media. Korkmaz (2020) and Vergili (2020) wrote about a similar subject and stated that teachers' new media and digital literacy levels decreased as their seniority increased. There is diversity between the age groups of "digital natives" and "digital immigrants" (Prensky, 2001; Rasi, Vuojärvi & Ruokamo, 2019). Senior teachers often cannot actively create and share their

writings, videos, or photos online. Their way of new media usage is consistent with other studies from the literature.

Six teachers did not have any formal media literacy education before. They agreed on the importance of media literacy education and the necessity of media literacy content in certain school subjects. Similarly, in Atmaca's (2016) research, student teachers had positive opinions about media literacy training in undergraduate university education. In media education studies, there are two schools of thought about teaching the media. One is a separate stand-alone course, the other one is an integration model. Hobbs (2011) mentioned this as one of the great debates of the media literacy movement. For her, whether a school or district uses an integration model or stand-alone approach (or a combination of both) should depend on the human, material, and other resources available.

The participant teachers were all aware of the media and digital literacy concept. They had access to media and digital sources and had an analytical and critical view of media content. However, only one of the teachers participated and shared her ideas. Even so, she was hesitant to share and create political content like the other five teachers. The reason for this could be unwillingness and reservation. The teachers did not want others to perceive them as partisan or one-sided. They did not want to be referred to as "the other" by their friends and colleagues. Being a civil servant was the second reason for this. The freedom of expression of civil servants is officially limited to realize the impartiality of the administration (Karaçağlayan, 2007). Therefore, being hesitant about sharing their ideas could be normal.

Conclusion

Continuous development of technology and its great importance in everyday life have various effects. The reshaping of school curricula and competencies and teachers' necessity to be digitally competent and media literate are reflections on education. Media literacy is to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate messages in a wide variety of media forms (Cicha and others, 2021; Potter, 2004). Digital literacy is the use of technology and technology-related learning and teaching processes, and the competency to comprehend the meaning through digital tools, mainly the internet (Cicha, et al., 2021; Spante, et al. 2018). Technology and globally developed information networks enrich the lives of people. However, not every people have the right and opportunity to access technology and media resources. Giving meaning to and getting meaning from media, and critically and reflexively evaluating media contents are the other crucial phases of media and digital literacy competencies. Teachers, at this point,

should have a mission. They should be role models and opinion leaders. This study presents teachers' views on digital and media literacy under six themes that would help and guide practitioners and policy developers in this aspect.

Recommendations

A media and digitally literate society could be possible first in the family and later in school. The study gives us an insight into teachers' opinions on media and digital literacy. All teachers should be media and digitally literate. They should access, analyze, critically evaluate and communicate in various media forms ethically and sustainably. Media literacy could be a must course during undergraduate education, and those who have not got any training about the subject could have in-service opportunities. This study is a qualitative descriptive study. Researchers could conduct further studies with more participants in quantitative research design and could analyze different correlational variables affecting teachers' media and digital literacies.

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