



LEVELS OF MEDIA COMPETENCE: RUSSIAN APPROACH

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Abstract: The author of this article arrive at the conclusion that media literacy/competence of personality is the sum total of the individual's motives, knowledge, skills, and abilities (indicators: motivation, contact, content, perception, interpretation/appraisal, activity, and creativity) to select, use, create, critically analyze, evaluate, and transfer media texts in various forms and genres and to analyze the complex processes of media functioning.

Keywords: media education, media competence, media literacy, universities, schools, students, classification, levels of media competence, principles, functions, Russia.

Media Education

According to the definition given in the UNESCO documents, *Media Education*

- deals with all communication media and includes the printed word and graphics, the sound, the still as well as the moving image, delivered on any kind of technology;
- enables people to gain understanding of the communication media used in their society and the way they operate and to acquire skills using these media to communicate with others;
- ensures that people learn how to analyse, critically reflect upon and create media texts; identify the sources of media texts, their political, social, commercial and/or cultural interests, and their contexts; interpret the messages and values offered by the media; select appropriate media for communicating their own messages or stories and for reaching their intended audience; gain or demand access to media for both reception and production.

Media education is part of basic entitlement of every citizen, in every country in the world, to freedom of expression and the right to information and is instrumental in building and sustaining democracy” [UNESCO, 1999, p.273-274].

In my view, this definition provides a reasonably complete characterization of the main media educational goals.

There are several directions that can be distinguished within media education: (a) media education for future professionals — journalists (the press, radio, TV, Internet, advertisement), moviemakers, editors, producers, etc.; (b) media education for pre-service and in-service teachers — in universities and teacher training colleges, and in media cultural courses within the system of advanced training; (c) media education as a part of general education for secondary and higher school students; it may be either integrated in the traditional disciplines or autonomous (i.e. taught as a specialized or optional course); (d) media education in educational and cultural centers (community interest clubs, centers for out-of-school activities and artistic development, etc.); (e) distance education of young and adult learners through television, radio, and the Internet; an important part here belongs to media critique, a specific sphere of journalism engaged in evaluation, analysis, and criticism of the mass media; (f) autonomous continuous media education, which in theory can be life-long.

Therefore, media education in the modern world can be described as the process of the development of personality with the help of and on the material of media, aimed at the shaping of culture of interaction with media, the development of creative, communicative skills, critical thinking, perception, interpretation, analysis and evaluation of media texts, teaching different forms of self-expression using media technology. Media literacy, as an outcome of this process, helps a person to actively use opportunities of the information field provided by the television, radio, video, film, press and Internet

[Fedorov, 2001, p.8]. First, to develop the person's critical thinking skills and critical autonomy. Second, to develop abilities to perceive, evaluate, understand, and analyze media texts of different forms and genres (including their moral implications and artistic qualities). And third, to teach students to experiment with the media, to create their own media products or texts.

There is a number of widespread terms often used as synonyms both in Russia and other countries: "information literacy", "information culture", "information knowledge" "information competency", "media literacy", "multimedia literacy", "computer literacy", "media culture", "media awareness", "media competence", etc. For example, N. Gendina, having analyzed various definitions related to information culture, points to the following terminological inconsistency: in the modern world, "nonunified terms such as 'computer literacy', 'information literacy' or 'information culture', often without clear definitions, increasingly replace such semantically close notions denoting human information knowledge and abilities as 'library and bibliography culture', 'reading culture', 'library and bibliography knowledge', and 'library and bibliography literacy' " [Gendina, 2005, p. 21].

Regarding media literacy as a major component of information literacy, it would be worth referring to a survey conducted among international experts in this field [Fedorov, 2003]. Many of them agree that media literacy is a result of media education. Yet there are certain discrepancies and confusion between such terms as "media education", "media literacy", and "media studies".

S.Ozhegov defines *culture* as (1) the sum total of economic, social, and spiritual achievements of human beings; (2) the state or quality of being *cultured*, i.e., being at a high level of cultural development or corresponding to it; (3) the raising of plants or animals; (4) a high level of something, the development or improvement of an ability [Ozhegov, 1989, p. 314]. Hence it follows that *media culture* (e.g., *audiovisual culture*) is the sum total of material and intellectual values in the sphere of media and a historically defined system of their reproduction and functioning in society. In relation to the audience, it may be a system of personality development levels of a person capable of media text perception, analysis, and appraisal, media creativity, and integration of new media knowledge.

According to N.A. Konovalova, *personality media culture* is the dialogue way of interaction with the information society, including the evaluation, technology, and creativity components, and resulting in the development of interaction subjects [Konovalova, 2004, p. 9].

Information culture may also be regarded as a system of personality development levels, a "component of human culture and the sum total of sustained skills and ongoing application of information technologies (IT) in one's professional activity and everyday practice" [Inyakin, Gorsky, 2000, p. 8].

N. Gendina believes that "*personality information culture* is part of human culture, the sum total of information world outlook and system of knowledge and skills ensuring independent purposeful activity to meet individual information needs by using both traditional and new information technologies. This component is a major factor of successful professional and nonprofessional work and social protection of an individual in the information society" [Gendina, 2005, p. 21].

Y. Inyakin and V. Gorsky point out that the model of shaping information culture includes personality culture components (knowledge, values and goal system, experience of cognitive and creative activity and communication) in relation to IT components (databases, Internet, TV, applications, e-mail, PowerPoint, etc.) [Inyakin, Gorsky, 2000, p. 10].

In my opinion, the notion of *information culture* is broader than *media culture*, because the former pertains to complex relationships between personality and any information, including media and the latter relates to contacts between the individual and media.

Comparison of traditional dictionary definitions of the terms "literacy" and "competence" also reveals their similarity and proximity. For example, S.I. Ozhegov defines the term "*competent*" as (1) knowledgeable and authoritative in a certain area; and (2) possessing competence, and the term "*competence*" as (1) the matters one is knowledgeable of; and (2) one's powers or authorities [Ozhegov, 1989, p. 289]. The same dictionary defines a *literate* person as (1) able to read and write, also able to write correctly, without mistakes; and (2) possessing necessary knowledge or information in a certain area [Ozhegov, 1989, p. 147].

Encyclopedic dictionaries define *literacy* as (1) in a broad sense - the possession of speaking and writing skills in accordance with standard language requirements; (2) in a narrow sense – the ability to read only or to read and write simple texts; and (3) the possession of knowledge in a certain area. The term *competence* [*compete(re)* (to) achieve, meet, be fitting] is defined as (1) the powers given by a law, statute or another enactment to a concrete office or an official; and (2) knowledge or experience in a certain area. There are many other definitions of literacy and competence (competency), but in general, they only differ stylistically.

Regardless of the similarity of definitions of “competence” and “literacy”, we are inclined to agree with N.I. Gendina that in popular understanding, “the word ‘literacy’ has a connotation of simplicity and primitiveness, reflecting the lowest, elementary, level of education” [Gendina, 2005, p. 21]. At the same time, the term “*competence*” seems to be more pinpoint and specific in relation to human knowledge and abilities than the broad and polysemantic word “*culture*”.

Such terms as “information literacy”, “media literacy”, “information culture of personality” or “media culture” have been frequently used in publications of the past years [Fedorov, 2001; 2005 etc.], but the above terminological analysis leads us to the conclusion that the terms “*information competence*” and “*media competence*” are more accurate in denoting the individual’ abilities to use, critically analyze, evaluate, and communicate media messages of various types, forms, and categories and to analyze complex information processes and media functioning in society. Thus, *media competence* can be regarded as a component of the more general term *information competence*.

Naturally, it is assumed that human information competence can and should be improved in the process of life-long learning. This is true for school and university students, economically active population and retired citizens (e.g., the information literacy development program for retired citizens at the Media Education Center of the South Urals University in Chelyabinsk).

I understand media literacy as the result of media education. In general, predominant among media educational concepts are the cognitive, educational, and creative approaches to the use of mass media potential. However, at the implementation level most media educational approaches integrate the three components. These are:

- acquiring knowledge about media history, structure, language, and theory —the cognitive component;
- development of the ability to perceive media texts, to “read” their language; activation of imagination and visual memory; development of particular kinds of thinking (including critical, logical, creative, visual, and intuitive); informed interpretation of ideas (ethical or philosophical problems and democratic principles), and images — the educational component;
- acquiring practical creative skills of working with media materials — creative component.

In each particular model these basic components are realized differently, depending on the conceptual preferences of the media educator.

The learning activities used in media education are also different: *descriptive* (re-create the media text, reconstruct the personages and events); *personal* (describe the attitudes, recollections, and emotions caused by the media text); *analytical* (analyze the media text structure, language characteristics, and viewpoints); *classificatory* (define the place of the text within the historical context); *explanatory* (commenting about the media text or its parts); or *evaluative* (judging about the merits of the text basing upon personal, ethical or formal criteria). As a result, the learners not only are exposed to the pleasurable effects of media culture, but they also acquire experience in media text interpretation (analyzing the author’s objectives, discussing — either orally or in writing — the particulars of plot and characters, ethical positions of personages or the author, etc.) and learn to connect it with personal experience of their own or others (e.g. putting themselves in the place of this or that personage, evaluating facts and opinions, finding out causes and effects, motives and consequences of particular actions, or the reality of events).

Moreover, while working with media texts young people have many opportunities to develop their

own creative habits and skills. For example, they may write reviews or mini-scripts; they are exposed to representations of their cultural heritage — and through these to the personal, historical, national, planetary and other perspectives on those events. While studying the main media cultural genres and forms, scanning the development of a particular theme within different genres or historical epochs, becoming familiar with the styles, techniques, and creative activities of the great masters, etc., they acquire much relevant knowledge and learn methods and criteria of media text evaluation. All of that contributes to the development of the student's aesthetic awareness, artistic taste, and creative individuality and influences the formation of civic consciousness.

As for “media illiteracy,” I see its main danger in the possibility of a person becoming an easy object for all sorts of manipulation on the part of the media... or becoming a media addict, consuming all media products without discrimination.

There are many skeptics, and some of them are well-qualified and educated people. For example, in *Russian Media Education Journal (Mediaobrazovanie)* N 2, 2005, we published an article “What Is Media Education” by Professor Kirill Razlogov, Director of the Russian Institute for Cultural Research, who holds a Ph.D. in cultural studies. He thinks that there is no sense in formal media education for all, because those who are really interested receive this kind of education spontaneously all through their life... Some people are certainly able to effectively develop their own media culture. However, public opinion polls show that the media competence of the majority of the audience, especially the younger generation, leaves much to be desired. True, there are some gifted individuals who successfully cultivate themselves without attending schools or universities — however, this is no cause for closing formal educational institutions...

I have no doubt that all universities, especially pedagogical ones, need media literacy courses, and media education must become part and parcel of the curriculum.

Both in the West and in Russia, the preference in media education today is given to the critical thinking/critical autonomy development theory, the cultural, sociocultural, and semiotic theories. Less popular is the protective theory, focusing upon screening the audience from the harmful influences of the media. However, my impression is that Western media educators seem to prefer the *practical* approach (with the emphasis on teaching practical skills for working with media equipment) and the *consumption and satisfying* (the needs of the audience) approach, whereas their Russian colleagues often favor the *artistic/aesthetic* approaches in media education. Universally recognized are the achievements of our colleagues from Canada and Australia, where media education is a compulsory school discipline. The philosophy and practices of the leading British, French, and American media educators have also obtained general recognition. Traditionally strong are the positions of media education in Scandinavian countries. As for the East European ones, the world obviously knows more about the experiences of Russian and Hungarian media educators, whereas the achievements of Poland, the Czech Republic, and Romania in this sphere remain little-known — not least on account of the language barrier. Of course, Canada and Australia are far ahead of others in making media education a reality. Here in Russia we have much to learn from them.

As I've already said, the theories of media education as the development of critical thinking (Critical Thinking Approach, Critical Autonomy Approach, Critical Democratic Approach, Le Jugement Critique, L'Esprit Critique, Representational Paradigm) are now popular in many countries, so there is considerable agreement with respect to goals and purposes. According to these theories, students need to develop the capacity to purposefully navigate a world of diverse and abundant information. They should be taught to consciously perceive, comprehend, and analyze it, and be aware of the machinery and consequences of its influence upon the audience. One-sided or distorted information (conveyed, in particular, by television, possessing a strong arsenal of propaganda) is no doubt a matter for reflection. That is why it's so important for the students to be able to tell the difference between the given or known facts and the facts that need to be checked; to identify a reliable source, a biased judgment, vague or dubious arguments, faulty reasoning, etc.

Such skills are especially valuable for the analysis of TV information programs: they make the viewers “immune” to unfounded statements and all kinds of falsehood. Irrespective of the political system they live in, people who are not prepared to interpret the multiform information they are

exposed to be not able to give it an all-round analysis. They cannot oppose the manipulative effects of the media (if there are such effects), and they are deprived of the tools of the media for expressing their own thoughts and feelings about what they have read, heard or seen.

Of course, we shouldn't oversimplify media education and, setting aside the artistic aspect, confine it to the development of critical thinking and to the study of TV commercials and information programs (where all sorts of manipulative techniques are the most obvious). However, I'm convinced that a developed capacity for critical thinking and mastery of such basic concepts of media education as *category, technology, language, representation, and audience* are the best aids in the analysis and evaluation of any media text.

Russian Media Education

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Media education in Russia can be divided into the following main **directions**:

- 1) media education of future professionals in the sphere of press, radio, television, cinema, video and internet-journalists, editors, directors, producers, actors, directors of photography, etc.;
- 2) pre-service media education of school and university level instructors at Universities, Pedagogical Institutes and in-service professional growth courses;
- 3) media education (integrated into the existing curriculum or autonomous - special courses, electives, clubs activities) as part of the general curriculum in secondary schools, colleges and institutes;
- 4) "out-of-school" media education in children/students' clubs, leisure centres, institutions of extracurricular work, clubs;
- 5) distant media education of schoolchildren, students and adults through press, television, radio, video, and Internet;
- 6) independent, continuous (theoretically, life-long) self media education [Penzin, 1987; Sharikov, 1990; Usov, 1993, Spitchkin, 1999; Zaznobina, 1999; Fedorov, 2001; 2005].

The key principles of media education in Russian pedagogy are:

- development of a personality (development of media perception, aesthetic consciousness, creative capabilities, individual critical thinking, analysis, etc.) in the process of study;
- connection of theory with practice; transition from training to self-education; correlation of education with life;
- consideration of idiosyncrasies, individuality of students.

The main functions of media education are the following: tutorial, adaptational, developing and directing.

The tutorial function presupposes the understanding of theories and laws, the adequate perception and critical analysis of a media text, capability to apply this knowledge in out-of-school contexts, logical capability.

The adaptational function displays in an initial stage of communication with media.

The developing function implies the development of creative, analytical and other capacities of personality.

Task directing functions provide conditions for the analysis of media works (Penzin, 1987; Sharikov, 1990; Spitchkin, 1999; Usov, 1993, Fedorov, 2001, 2005, etc.).

The important element in media education curriculum is the **evaluation of the level of students' media literacy**.

Classification of Levels of Media Literacy/Media competence

Table 1. Media Literacy/Competence Levels' Classification

<i>Media Literacy/Competence Indicators</i>	<i>Description</i>
Motivation	Motives of contact with media: genre- or subject-based, emotional, epistemological, hedonistic, psychological, ethical, intellectual, esthetic, therapeutic, etc.
Contact (Communication)	Frequency of contact/communication with media
Contents	Knowledge of media terminology, theory, and history
Perception	Ability to perceive various media texts
Interpretation/Appraisal	Ability to analyze critically social effects of media and media texts of various genres and types, based on perception and critical thinking development levels
Activity	Ability to select media and to skills to create/distribute one's own media texts; self-training information skills
Creativity	Creative approach to different aspects of media activity

Detailed descriptions of the audience's media literacy development levels for each indicator (based on the above classification) are given in Tables 2-8.

Table 2. Motivation Indicator Development Levels

<i>Level</i>	<i>Description</i>
High	A wide range of genre- or subject-based, emotional, epistemological, hedonistic, psychological, creative, ethical, intellectual, and esthetic motives to contact media flows, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - media text genre and subject diversity; - new information; - recreation, compensation, and entertainment (moderate); - identification and empathy; - confirmation of one's own competence in different spheres of life, including information; - search of materials for educational, scientific, and research purposes - esthetic impressions; - philosophic/intellectual, - ethical or esthetic dispute/dialogue with media message authors and critique of their views; - learning to create one's own media texts.
Medium	A range of genre- or subject-based, emotional, epistemological, hedonistic, psychological, ethical, and esthetic motives to contact media flows, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - media texts' genres and subject diversity; - thrill; - recreation and entertainment; - identification and empathy; - new information; - learning ethical lessons from media texts; - compensation; - psychological "therapy"; - esthetic impressions; <p><i>Intellectual and creative motives to contact media are poorly expressed or absent.</i></p>

Low	A narrow range of genre- or subject-based, emotional, hedonistic, ethical, and psychological motives to contact media, including: - entertainment - information; - thrill; - compensation; - psychological “therapy”; <i>Esthetic, intellectual, and creative motives to contact media flows are not present.</i>
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Table 3. Contact Indicator Development Levels

<i>Level</i>	<i>Description</i>
High	Everyday contacts with various types of media and media texts
Medium	Contacts with various types of media and media texts a few times a week
Low	Contacts with various types of media and media texts a few times a month

This indicator is ambivalent. On the one hand, the audience’s high level of contacts with various media and media texts does not automatically mean the high level of media literacy in general (one may watch TV, videos or DVDs for hours every day but be still unable to analyze media texts). On the other hand, low-frequency contacts may mean not only the individual’s introvert character but also his high-level selectivity and reluctance to consume bad-quality (in his opinion) media products.

Table 4. Content Indicator Development Levels

<i>Level</i>	<i>Description</i>
High	Knowledge of basic terms, theories, and history of mass communication and media art culture, clear understanding of mass communication processes and media effects in social and cultural context
Medium	Knowledge of some basic terms, theories and facts of history of mass communication processes, media art culture and media effects
Low	Poor knowledge of basic terms, theories and facts of history of mass communication processes, media art culture and media effects.

Table 5. Perception Indicator Development Levels

<i>Level</i>	<i>Description</i>
High: “comprehensive identification”	Identification with an author of a media text with basic components of primary and secondary identification preserved
Medium: “secondary identification”	Identification with a character (or an actor) of a media text, i.e., the ability to empathize with a character, to understand his/her motives; adequate perception of certain elements of a media text (details, etc.)
Low: “primary identification”	Emotional and psychological connection with the environment and a story line (sequence of events) of a media text, i.e., the ability to perceive the sequence of events of media text and naïve identification of reality with the plot; assimilation of the message environment.

When analyzing the perception indicator, it should be noted that the majority of people remember 40 percent of what they saw and 10 percent of what they heard [Potter, 2001, p. 24], and that the

perception of information is both an *active* and *social* process [Buckingham, 1991, p. 22]. There are many factors contributing to the success of mass media texts: reliance on folklore and mythology; permanency of metaphors; consistent embodiment of the most sustained story lines; synthesis of the natural and supernatural; addressing the emotional, not the rational, through identification (imaginary transformation into characters and merger with the aura of a work); protagonists' "magic power"; standardization (replication, unification, and adaptation) of ideas, situations, characters, etc.; motley; serialization; compensation (illusion of dreams coming true); happy end; rhythmic organization of movies, TV programs or video clips where the audience is affected not only by the content of images but also their sequence; intuitive guessing at the audience's subconscious strivings; etc.

Table 6. Interpretation/Appraisal Indicator Development Levels

<i>Level</i>	<i>Description</i>
High	Ability to analyze critically the functioning of media in society given various factors, based on highly developed critical thinking; analysis of media texts, based on the perceptive ability close to comprehensive identification; ability to analyze and synthesize the spatial and temporal form of a text; comprehension and interpretation implying comparison, abstraction, induction, deduction, synthesis, and critical appraisal of the author's views in the historical and cultural context of his work (expressing reasonable agreement or disagreement with the author, critical assessment of the ethical, emotional, esthetic, and social importance of a message, ability to correlate emotional perception with conceptual judgment, extend this judgment to other genres and types of media texts, connect the message with one's own and other people's experience, etc.); this reveals the critical autonomy of a person; his/her critical analysis of the message is based on the high-level content, motivation, and perception indicators.
Medium	Ability to analyze critically the functioning of media in society given some most explicit factors, based on medium-level critical thinking; ability to characterize message characters' behavior and state of mind, based on fragmentary knowledge; ability to explain the logical sequence of events in a text and describe its components; absence of interpretation of the author's views (or their primitive interpretation; in general, critical analysis is based on the medium-level content, motivation, and perception indicators.
Low	Inability to analyze critically the functioning of media in society and to think critically; unstable and confused judgments; low-level insight; susceptibility to external influences; absence (or primitiveness) of interpretation of authors' or characters' views; low-level tolerance for multivalent and complex media texts; ability to render a story line; generally, analysis is based on the medium-level content, motivation, and perception indicators.

Table 7. Activity Indicator Development Levels

<i>Level</i>	<i>Description</i>
High	Practical ability to choose independently and skills to create/distribute media texts (including personal and collaborative projects) of different types and genres; active self-training ability
Medium	Practical ability to choose and skills to create/distribute media texts (including personal and collaborative projects) of different types and genres with the aid of specialists (teacher/consultant)
Low	Inability (or insufficient ability) to choose and skills to create/distribute media texts; inability or reluctance to engage in media self-training.

Table 8. Creativity Indicator Development Levels

<i>Level</i>	<i>Description</i>
High	Creativity in different types of activities (perceptive, game, esthetic, research, etc.) connected with media (including computers and Internet)
Medium	Creativity is not strongly expressed and manifests itself only in some types of activity connected with media
Low	Creative abilities are weak, fragmentary or absent at all.

Regretfully, there is a danger of narrowing down media literacy/competence to computer or Internet literacy levels (which is the case with some Russian media organizations). In our view, such practices ignore influential mass media (the press, TV, radio, and cinema), which is a discriminatory approach to the problem.

Thus I arrive at the conclusion that *media literacy/competence of personality is the sum total of the individual's motives, knowledge, skills, and abilities (indicators: motivation, contact, content, perception, interpretation/appraisal, activity, and creativity) to select, use, create, critically analyze, evaluate, and transfer media texts in various forms and genres and to analyze the complex processes of media functioning.*

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