

IMPORTANCE OF MEDIA LITERACY AMONG SCHOOLCHILDREN IN ARMENIA,
PARENT'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE ISSUE

by

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Introduction

Media Literacy is not a term that is discussed widely in Armenia. In fact, the majority of the older generation do not understand and have never heard of the term. Even many young people don't acknowledge the importance of media literacy. It is, therefore, not surprising that in these conditions, Armenia lacks research in the field of media literacy levels among the population. Armenia also lacks policies or initiatives to solve the issue of an uninformed society in the field of media. This is especially important when in the past decade media became an inseparable part of our daily lives and the primary source of information. This research is aimed to measure media literacy levels among parents who have children that are above the age of 18 who are more vulnerable to manipulation. Considering many risks and the negative impact that media can have on children and adolescents, such as fake news, disinformation, cyber bullying, online harassment, privacy issues and that government's power is limited, when it comes to online platforms, the aim is to teach responsible consumption by media consumers. This research intends to show how can government regulations make media consumption a better experience for young people. It is also a responsibility of every individual to build his or her consumption behavior. However, children under 15 are not informed or educated well enough to make the right choices. Taking into account different factors such as media literacy lessons, parental advice that can shape children's views, the government should use these factors for the youth's benefit. So, the aim of media literacy educators must be teaching young people under 15 to make the right choices and build their own credible and safe environment in the digital world.

This research is aimed to gather information concerning the topic of media education on different levels: through interviews with parents and professionals in the field.

Many international institutions such as UNESCO and NGOs such as European Association for Viewers Interest (EAVI) and also one of the major NGO's in Armenia "Media Initiatives Center" acknowledge the urgent need of media education and media literacy. By becoming media literate individuals are able to evaluate media and acquire better understanding how media impacts our lives and in that way make the media experience better. Another objective of the study is to discover gaps and challenges as well as discuss particular problems that Armenian society may face connected to changes in curriculum. It includes the attitude of parents towards the changes in curriculum and readiness of teachers and instructors to add media education in their program. It also includes the attitude of the government towards initiating media education projects.

Overall, taking into consideration that the media is considered one of the agents of socialization we can firmly say that has a great impact on youth and their decisions. This research is aimed to fulfill the need of research in the field and includes other agents of socialization that are parents and teachers, and examine their opinion and their role.

While this capstone project was in its final stages, on 19th of April 2017, the Minister of Education and Media Initiatives NGO signed a memorandum of understanding. According to it Ministry of Education will assist Media Initiative Center in raising awareness about potential risks and importance of media education and in including media education in school curriculum. This will create new prospects and facilitate the process of creating media literate society.

Literature Review

Media Literacy and Armenia

There are several definitions of media literacy, but in this research, media literacy is referred to as “ability of people to access, understand, create and critically evaluate different types of media.” (European Commission, 2016) Media literate individuals are better able to understand the complex messages they receive in their everyday life from different sources of information such as television, radio, Internet, newspapers, magazines, books, billboards, video games, music, and all other forms of media.

UN-Alliance of Civilizations recognized the urgent need of media education, however as research by The International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media suggests that nowadays there is a change in the protection of children concerning media and harmful effects. Now, their objective is to equip young generation with the required knowledge to use media wisely, rather than keep them away from media and possible harmful content. (Carlsson, 2008) In the age of new technologies it is nearly impossible to keep children and youth away from all the means of media, teaching them skills of using the media wisely is more crucial in our days.

Many experts around the globe addressed the need for media literacy. (Lee, 2010) However, there is no actual research that has been done aiming to measure the media literacy levels in Armenia and especially among schoolchildren that are more likely to be impacted by media. In Armenia, media education is not included in the curriculum and is not mandatory in schools. However, NGOs like Media Initiatives Center developed a handbook for teachers in order to develop media literacy among schoolchildren. The handbook includes theory and practical exercises. It aims to improve teachers’ abilities and give them directions to understand how they

can conduct an effective media literacy class. Several pilot classes were held in the schools of Yerevan. (Internews, 2013) There is no research done in Armenia concerning media literacy levels and the negative impact that media illiteracy can it may have. However, on April 19, 2017 memorandum of understanding was signed between Media Initiative Center and Ministry of Education and Science. (Media Initiatives Center, 2017)

Factors that shape Media Literacy

Most of the studies that are conducted in the field of media literacy underline the importance of media literacy and recognize critical thinking as important if not the most important part of media literacy among people. That also indicates that during media literacy lessons in school besides identifying credible sources and learning other useful skills, exercises will be done and specially designed strategy must be used in order to improve critical thinking skills.

Research suggests that various factors shape the media literacy levels among people, such as individual competencies, environmental factors and other many sub categories that create the levels of media literacy. (EAVI Consortium, 2010) Both EAVI's research team and Carlsson suggest that critical thinking is a vital part of media literacy and therefore to be an important part of media education. (Carlsson, 2008) The power of government is limited when it comes to the Internet and the information children receive through the web can't be controlled, so critical thinking is a skill that is recognized by many experts. (McGonagle,2013)

Impact of media and solutions

Numerous studies have been done and continuous research is being conducted in the field of media literacy because of the rapid development of information in the age of new

technologies. A lot of beneficial properties are shown and analyzed in the studies. A study conducted by Austin and Pinkleton suggests that teaching media literacy is a great tool to reduce the influence of misleading media messages on young people's decision-making concerning alcohol, tobacco, and other substances that are due to false marketing strategies. Overall, the paper proves that media literate people are more likely to critically analyze messages sent through social medias and thus avoid their negative consequences that may have. (Austin, E.W. & Pinkleton, 2016) Another scholarly article written by Psychosocial Paediatrics Committee summarizes the effect of media use on children and youth. The study shows key benefits of media such as a source for the information, way of entertainment, and research tool. However there are many drawbacks and the article outlines many of them: misinformation, violation of rights, plagiarism, abuse and risk of access of predators. (Psychosocial Paediatrics Committee, 2003).

Tarlach McGonagle, a senior lecturer at the University of Amsterdam acknowledges civic participation, empowerment, bridging the digital divide, risk reduction, protection from harmful content, informed decision-making, consumer protection as the main rationales for promoting media literacy. (*McGonagle,2013*) Another research also asserts that media literacy can have a positive impact on decision-making and make youth less impacted by manipulative content. When in fact, it recognizes that cyberbullying, online harassment, Facebook depression are the potential problems that can arise from incorrect use of media, misunderstanding. It can also change the notion of what is normal for the youth that are not media literate. (O'Keeffe G. S., & Clarke-Pearson, K. 2011)

Overall, media education through different means is a solution to diminish many threats that media can have especially on the younger generation. Back to the critical thinking skills: all

the bad impact that media has on children is because of the irrational consumption of the media, so they learn to make responsible decisions and be aware of the risks. (Evens Foundation, 2015) According to Events Foundation, critical attitude is the solution to the adverse effects of media, but the learning in the family is in the first place. So, besides media education in schools, the family also needs to have their investment in their child's education. (Evens Foundation, 2015)

Parent's role

Despite all the government policies that are to regulate children's media literacy levels and teach them critical thinking in the schools, outside classroom contribution must be made to fully reach the desired result.

There are some obstacles to why parent are not capable of teaching their children media literacy. As American Academy of Pediatrics reports new technologies and social media means makes gaps between children and parents, as most of the parents are not able to follow the changes that children and youth are obsessed with the whole day. (O'Keeffe G. S., & Clarke-Pearson, K. 2011) Another research recognizes media education as the part of the parental education, however, observes two main reasons why families don't teach media education because they don't recognize the importance of media education, or families are not media literate to pass the knowledge to their children. (Evens Foundation, 2015) Eventually, parents have an important role in their child's development and learning tendencies before they reach some age, and one of the major problems of passing the knowledge of media literacy is, media illiteracy of parents that can be solved through seminars, campaigns, workshops and special projects. (Evens Foundation, 2015) (Carlsson, 2008)

Recommendations by other studies

Empowerment Through Media Education and study by EAVI include further recommendations concerning media education. Majority recommendations are mainly based on the findings of the positive impact of media education and are aimed to make above-mentioned advantages more effective.

Both of them encourage further research in the field and raising awareness about media literacy among the public. Implement government policies to make the educational process through different levels: targeting different genders and ages. (Carlsson, 2008) (EAVI, 2010) Furthermore, Academy of Pediatrics suggests that parents must be given a priority to be informed and through parents regulate the media literacy levels among children. (O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011).

The report conducted by United Nations Alliance of Civilizations outlines the importance of media literacy among people. Again, it states the main objective- democratizing society and promoting educational opportunities. By being media literate people are more aware of their rights and so on. The project suggests long-term and not only solid curricular proposals, but besides that quality teacher training, other guidelines and much coordination and group work among teachers. (The United Nations, 2009)

Overall, there are many studies done concerning media literacy and education. Experts all over the world recognize and admit the need for media education not only in schools but also in a larger sector. There are also problems that can arise on the national level that must be considered. Differences due to the culture and mentality must be taken into account and this research is aiming to discover and resolve the gaps that exist because of many factors. The research that will be conducted is devoted to fulfilling the lack of research in the field of media literacy in Armenia intending to make media literacy education mandatory in schools.

Statement of central research question(s)

Could media education as a mandatory part of school curriculum elevate the existing low rates of media literacy among Armenian schoolchildren?

Sub question 1: What measures can be taken to achieve media literacy in Armenia?

Sub question 2: Do parents understand the importance of media education and are they taking steps towards teaching their children critical thinking?

Methodology

Content analysis/Data Collection

Data from international sources are included in this research paper, as there is lack of research in this field in Armenia. There is no actual research done in Armenia to find out the existing rates of media literacy levels among youth and older people. I have separated the most outstanding research and studies that have been done concerning media literacy, media impact on children and youth. Many international institutions recognized the need of media literacy among people such as UNESCO and European Association for Viewers Interest, and many of my sources such as “Empowerment Through Media Education” are the response to the need of media literacy levels. Some of the studies include recommendations section and in most of them researchers mention the need of further research in the field. I have collected studies done in the field, trying to highlight the recent studies, taking into consideration that the topic changes and the responses to it change very rapidly especially in this age of information and technologies.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with teachers and experts in the field to have an insight about the topic from different perspectives and are from different social classes and occupations that have some experience in the media sector.

1. **NGOs:** The first round of interviews was conducted with NGOs that deal with media literacy in Armenia in order to find out more about the projects that they have designed and future plans. An interview with Lusine Grigoryan was conducted who is the representative of Media Initiatives Center that created a handbook for teachers of media literacy. They have also designed an interactive test that is believed to find out how media literate is the individual. As one of the major NGOs that deals with media education in the country, the information gathered

from their experts is an important asset to in future facilitate the process of making the changes on the governmental level.

Several interviews with “Info Houses” were conducted. “Info Houses” are non-governmental organizations that are located in different regions in Armenia. The project is jointly implemented by Media Initiative Center, USAID, and Eurasia Partnership Foundation. In the centers, trained experts conduct media education upon demand. Every person in different age categories can apply to participate in media literacy trainings. I conducted semi-structured interviews with experts from Martuni, Gyumri and Ararat “Info Houses”.

2. **Teachers:** Semi-structured interviews were held with teachers that have conducted classes and trainings in Yerevan in cooperation with “Media Initiatives” NGO in order to get their feedback and expert opinion. Interviews were aimed to find out if there is media illiteracy among schoolchildren and what problems it raises, do they think that that media education must be part of mandatory education in schools and their opinion about the role of parents in this process.

Teachers are people that have direct communication with children in a learning environment. They have the best understanding what the major obstacles are to achieving media educated society, as they have also conducted the media classes with children. They can give a better insight of the situation.

Interviews were conducted with media education specialists Michael Yalanuzyan, Karine Samvelyan and Karine Harutyunyan.

Michael Yalanuzyan is a media specialist of Ayb School. Karine Samvelyan is deputy director of a school, she is teaching physics and at the same time she is also conducting media literacy trainings. Karine Harutyunyan is an author of a textbook of Social Science and conducts

trainings of teachers. She included media literacy handbook created by Internews NGO in the textbook she created and designed.

Surveys

Parents: Non-probability convenience sampling method was used to collect data. The survey was designed in a way that tried to find out as precisely as possible do parents understand the importance of media education especially in younger ages. Targeted number of parents to fill out the survey was 50-70 and during the research I collected 52 responses of parents. Both face-to-face and online interviews were conducted. Surveys were distributed to parents that have a child or children younger than 18. The survey aimed to find out do parents in Yerevan know what is media literacy, are they controlling their child's use of media and if yes how, and what is their attitude towards adding media education in their child's mandatory curriculum. These surveys discover the levels of understanding of media literacy among relatively older generation and their attitude. Another important component of the survey was that parents were asked to they think that media education should be included in school curriculum when they were not told what exactly media education includes, but what they think it is and after they got the definition of media education and were asked the same question. This survey was designed to especially find out the relationship between the education degree the parents have and their opinion about including media education.

Research Findings and Analysis

Overall, there are eight Info Houses in Martuni, Gyumri, Vayq, Vanadzor, Armavir, Ararat, Syunik and in Ijevan that are aimed to elevate media literacy levels among the population in Armenia. The project is jointly implemented by Media Initiative Center, USAID, and Eurasia Partnership Foundation. The objectives of the project are improving youth awareness of internet tools, and networking opportunities for young people, encouraging alternative media on the activities of the telecommunications sector by taking advantage of the opportunities available in the widest possible coverage and promoting the center through online and traditional media. Interviews with Gyumri, Martuni and Ararat Info Houses were conducted. Results showed that there is a shared concern about media literacy levels especially in regions not only among youth but also among the older generation.

Interviews with Info Houses:

Despite the fact that many people understand and decide to apply to “Info Houses” many of don’t even successfully pass the course. The only positive thing about it is that people, in fact, start acknowledging the importance of media education and they are even motivated to take the media education course again, in order not to face any challenges after. However, a big part of people that apply to Info Houses already have some problems concerning media, its use or have some privacy issues and lack of information, and others are just interested in the topic or want to become journalists. There is an existing interest towards the topic, but only form low percent of the population that is the biggest problem that Info Houses are facing. There is a lack of awareness and the mission of Info Houses is to solve that.

Everybody is free to apply to Info Houses despite their age or gender. Every Info House designed programs for the media education course that are similar but optimized for their media expert and population and learning outcomes. People from various backgrounds apply for to Info Houses to participate in trainings: including young people, parents, teachers. So, we can conclude that there is a lack of media literacy not only among children and youngsters but also among older population.

All the “Info Houses” agree and urge that there is a critical need for media education especially among schoolchildren. They are not able to protect their personal data, intellectual property and be aware and protected from general impact of media, propaganda and manipulation. In Info Houses students learn how media works from inside, separate and discuss the traditional and new media, try to make media materials for different means of media, get acquainted with the ethical rules of the right to freedom of speech and the media with critical approach, because if they do not analyze news they get critically they will not understand why they decided to cover that news especially by that mean of the medium. Trainings include interactive elements to enhance learning efficiency.

All Info Houses state and that making media education as part of mandatory part of school curriculum is very important and if not mandatory part but at least some short term trainings in schools. Project Manger Liana Hovhanissyan mentioned “In the 20s, when cinematography became popular in France cinematography classes were taught at universities. It turns out that around 100 years ago, people realized that information that is massive and reaches all segments of society must be educated”.

To sum up, interviews show that the problem exists especially in the regions and experts in the field that often communicate with people from different backgrounds and ages see and

distinguish the problems that can be solved with the help of media education not only by the school program but also with other extracurricular trainings combined.

Interviews with media education specialists

Media education is included in Ayb school's curriculum from September 2015 as an elective subject. The media education specialist of Ayb private school Michael Yalanuzyan joined Ayb in 2016. Students not only learn the subject as a part of a lecture, they also have an opportunity to do an observation and learn from practical work. The program includes both theoretical and practical components. The practical part is the prevailing. Student of 11 and 12 classes have an opportunity to choose their research topic for the course and have an opportunity to publish it.

All interviewees admitted that there is a huge lack of media literacy among young people especially in the age of extremely rapid growth. As Carlsson mentions if you know how to use media and have all the necessary skills to analyze it, you will have a critical approach towards media, however, first of all we need to understand young people's approach and correlation with media. (Carlsson, 2008) The problem can be seen especially when they are accessing information and due to media illiteracy can be exposed to the wrong understanding of events, occurrences, and political and economic processes. Media expert Michael Yalanuzyan mentions: "If in normal conditions, we do not give much importance to the reliability of the information media, during the internal processes, external and internal military conflicts, war and other emergency situations, information can have very serious consequences on their rights, endanger people's lives". They are missing all the best opportunities that they can find online, for example there are many educational materials online and the website imdroc.am is under construction and

it contains all the materials they need. So, children waste their time and don't use best and more useful part of the Internet to improve their skills and gain knowledge.

One of the major obstacles is that many students especially in Yerevan are not interested in the topic and don't have a desire to learn and low understanding of importance of the topic. Two media specialists think that media education should be included in school curriculum as a mandatory class, however media expert Karine Harutyunyan thinks that there is no need for separate class as it can be included in Social Science class. However, according to her teachers in the first place need to be educated as majority of teachers nowadays lacks media literacy. Another thing is that school directors also need trainings.

All the media education experts outlined the import role of parents in child's media education, however, they also acknowledge that they can't blame parents as media literacy as a part of overall education should be conducted in schools. According to Sara Pereira, there are three types of parental media meditation: restrictive, active or evaluative and indirect. Restrictive is when parents ban or restrict the time of media use. Active is when parents explain media to their children and non-focused or indirect is when they observe that included no or limited engagement by parents. According to many studies, the most effective is evaluative mediation. (The Evens Foundation, 2015) According to media specialists in regions and also in Yerevan, there is a lack of media literacy especially among parents. I have conducted a survey to find out the knowledge of parents of media literacy.

Survey Results

52 responses were collected from parents that have children above the age of 18. Besides demographic questions, the survey included other questions that were aimed to find out how many people could define the term media literacy and do they think it should be included in

schools. Survey question number six included about media literacy was multiple choice and included also some false answers in order to know what percent of people actually knew what is media literacy. *See appendices*

Demographics: 73% of respondents are females and only 23% are males. There is a disbalance of genders, which is considered as a limitation of this research paper. Around 52% of respondents have master's degree, 33% have bachelor's degree and 7.7% each secondary education and doctoral degree. *See appendices.*

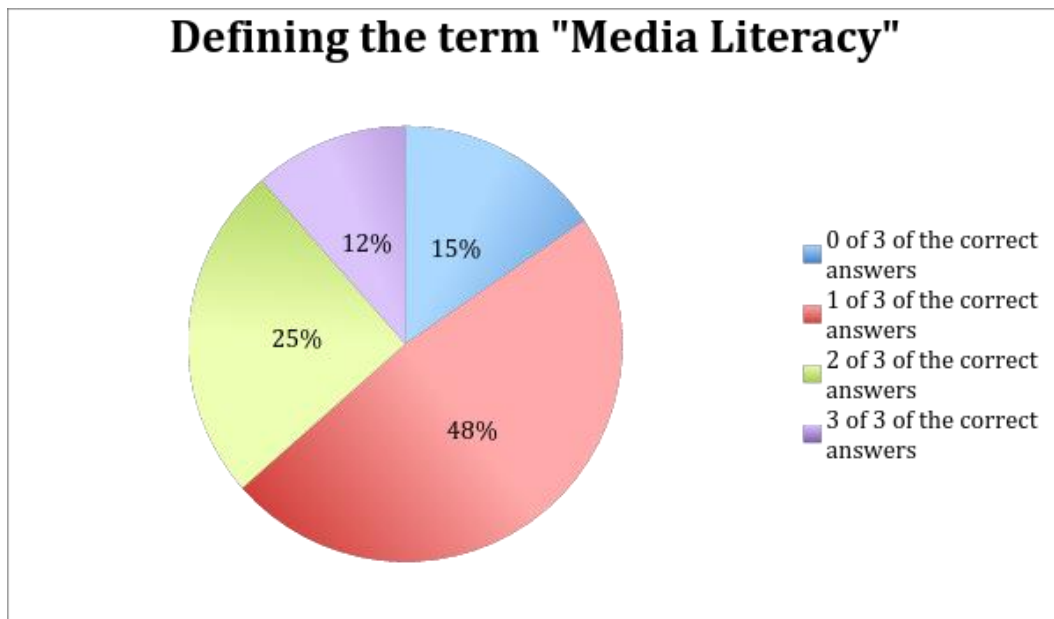


Figure 1

Based on surveys we can conclude that parents do not really understand what does media literacy means. Figure 1 shows that only 11.5% of respondents could define the term correctly and 15.4% of respondents did not choose any correct answer. This shows that very few people can define media literacy and thus not knowing what actually media education includes cannot

agree or not whether they need it or not. This shows, that in the first place parents need to be educated about it.

Table 1

Gender * Do you regulate or oversee your child's use of the media(if yes, how?) Crosstabulation					
			Do you regulate or oversee your child's use of the media(if yes, how?)		
			Yes	No	Total
Gender	Male	Count	3	11	14
		% within Gender	21.4%	78.6%	100.0%
	Female	Count	29	9	38
		% within Gender	76.3%	23.7%	100.0%
Total		Count	32	20	52
		% within Gender	61.5%	38.5%	100.0%

Chi-square statistical test was conducted and the results are shown in the Table 1. Results are statistically significant and show that 76.3% of overall 61.5% of the parents that regulate their child’s media use are females. And the data is significant because it shows that only 21.4% of male respondents regulate their child’s media usage. So, this means that females are more likely to regulate. Overall, almost 40% of parents do not oversee their child’s media use.

Another important part of the survey that was conducted is that how people’s answers and opinions change concerning adding media education in schools as a mandatory subject before and after it is explained to respondents what exactly media literacy means. Chi-square

statistical test was used to show how many people changed their opinion and compare before and after results. According to the Table 3 about 17% of people who answered they think media education should be included in schools changed their mind after being introduced to what media literacy is. And 35.3% of people that answered “no” to the question “Do you think media education must be included in the school curriculum?” changed their answer to agree after the explanation. To sum up, larger percent of people agreed to have media education in schools after disagreeing, thus we can conclude that when parents will be educated and know what actually media literacy is, what are its risks they will be likely to agree and take steps towards the issue. We can conclude that mothers are more attentive towards their children and somehow are taking steps to limit their child’s exposure to bad or violent content.

Table 2

Do you think media education must be included in the school curriculum? * Do you agree or disagree that media education classes must be included in the school curriculum? Crosstabulation								
		Do you agree or disagree that media education classes must be included in the school curriculum?					Total	
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Agree	Strongly Agree		
Do you think media education must be included in the school curriculum?	Yes	Count	1	3	0	15	4	23
		% within Do you think media education must be included in the school curriculum?	4.3%	13.0%	.0%	65.2%	17.4%	100.0%
	No	Count	0	9	2	6	0	17
		% within Do you think media education must be included in the school curriculum?	.0%	52.9%	11.8%	35.3%	.0%	100.0%
	Don't know	Count	0	3	5	4	0	12
		% within Do you think media education must be included in the school curriculum?	.0%	25.0%	41.7%	33.3%	.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	1	15	7	25	4	52	

	% within Do you think media education must be included in the school curriculum?	1.9%	28.8%	13.5%	48.1%	7.7%	100.0%
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Conclusion: To wrap up all written above research findings show that there is a need for media literacy in Armenia regardless of age and occupation, gender and education. Many parents especially females are trying to control their child’s media use, however, if the level of media literacy is not elevated especially among parents, they are constantly going to face some issues concerning privacy, information access, biases and critical evaluation of the information they get from traditional or alternative media.

Many experts from NGOs share a concern about having trainings for teachers regardless of the subject they are teaching, for them to be able to catch up with the knowledge that children will gain and have their additional impact on children.

Now, when the memorandum of understanding is signed, media education will be included in schools as a part of the other class and hopefully, it will solve many issues. This is a great step forward because, after many years of effort, it finally came into reality. According to it both sides will work on making media education in schools:

- create materials for formal and non-formal learning
- assist in the training of directors, teachers
- guarantee that educational materials developed for educational institutions
- review some subjects, namely Social Sciences class program, with the purpose of integrating

media literacy in that class. (Media Initiatives Center, 2017)

Limitations and Avenues for Further Research

Due to small sample size, the survey findings may not ensure a representative distribution of the whole population and to be considered representative of groups of people to whom results will be generalized or transferred. There is a gender disbalance in the survey result. Surveys were conducted only in Yerevan that limits overall picture for Armenia and represents the ideas and findings only for Yerevan parents. Due to the time constraints, the research is limited in exploring more literature in the field and survey results.

For further research media literacy levels among children could be researched and media effects on them especially in Yerevan. There is still a need for further research among parents in order to understand what further step should be taken in order to elevate media literacy levels among the whole population and especially for more vulnerable groups to the potential risks.

Recommendations:

- ✓ Design and implement trainings with parents in order to encourage dialogue between them and their children and encourage making parental media mediation from indirect to active.
- ✓ Develop comprehensive media education guides and programs at all education levels.
- ✓ Conduct trainings for teachers and school directors.
- ✓ Include media education in Armenian State Pedagogical University's program
- ✓ Promote create project production by children and young people and exchange the experiences to achieve more results.
- ✓ Recognize, award and promote productions by children and young people

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Appendices

Survey Questions for Parents

1. Gender *

- Man
- Woman

2. Your age *

3. What is the highest level of education you have completed? *

- Secondary Education
- Bachelor or equivalent
- Masters or equivalent
- PHD

4. Age of your child (if you have more than one child please mention average age) *

5. Do you think media education must be included in the school curriculum?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

6. How do you understand the concept "Media Literacy"? (Choose all that apply) *

- Ability to evaluate news
- Ability to read and write
- Ability to critically evaluate different types of media
- Ability to produce media materials
- It is connected with journalism
- Other:

7. Do you regulate or oversee your child's use of the media(if yes, how?) *

Yes

No

Other:

Media literacy is described as an “ability of people to access, understand, create and critically evaluate different types of media

8. Do you agree or disagree that media education should be included in school curriculum?

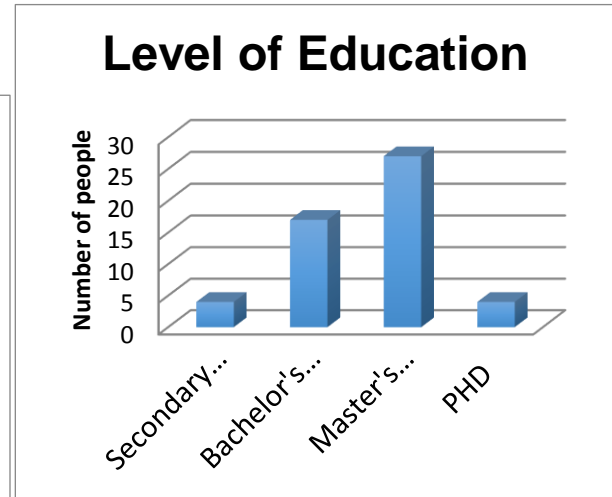
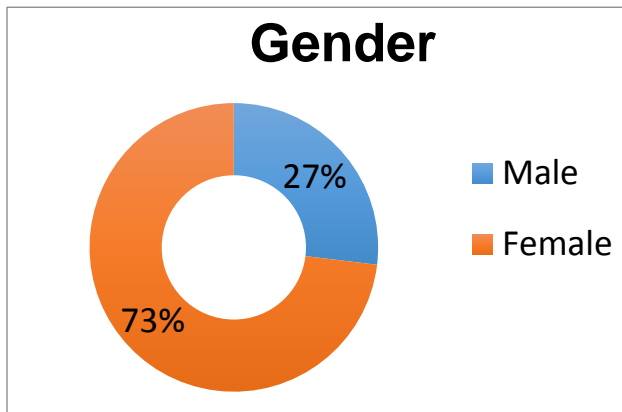
Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Don't know

Agree

Strongly Agree



Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age of your child (if you have more than one child please mention average age)	52	1	20	7.71	5.237
Valid N (listwise)	52				

correct					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	8	15.4	15.4	15.4
	1	25	48.1	48.1	63.5
	2	13	25.0	25.0	88.5
	3	6	11.5	11.5	100.0
	Total	52	100.0	100.0	

Interviews with InfoHouses

Gyumri:

What are the main reasons and aims that people visit your center?

The main reasons of applying and visiting their center are because people are facing some problems and very little percent of people are coming to be educated beforehand not to face any problems concerning media. We have our media education classes that consist of 25 lessons twice a year. For every media literacy class 30 to 40 people are applying, however only half of them, sometimes even less people successfully pass the course. Everybody is free to apply to our center. Our media specialist conducts media education. The experience shows that 25 basic topics that we cover are good but not enough to be fully media literate in the age of new media and new media development.

Is there media illiteracy especially among youth and, if yes, how can we elevate existing low rated of media illiteracy?

The lack of literacy is obvious among youth. They not media literate and even are not willing to learn. There are a lot of things we need to do, because the youth does not posses with the even minimal requirements to be considered media literate. Therefore, they can not protect their personal data, intellectual property and be aware and protected from general impact of media, propaganda and manipulation.

Do you think that media literacy should be included in mandatory curriculum in schools?

Media education must be mandatory class in schools, because in this information technology era, when life is divided into two parts: visual and virtual, and if we consider that we spend most of our time in virtual world and in case of visual we spend it with media, thus media education is one of the most important subjects for schoolchildren.

Martuni:

What are the main reasons and aims that people visit your center?

Martuni “Info House” was designed to provide high quality journalism and public control through the dissemination of media literacy. It aims to raise importance of media education, because in the formation of citizens traditional way is no longer as effective as new and alternative media. So, we raising awareness about challenges in media and that it is difficult to be well-educated users and if you are not familiar with media manipulations, safety rules and you don’t know how media productions are created, you can easily get deceived. People, who realize the importance and urgent need of media education, begin to attend and participate in the "media literacy" courses.

Is there media illiteracy especially among youth and, if yes, how can we elevate existing low rated of media illiteracy?

A significant percentage of citizens who apply to us are young people, especially high school students. There are several main reasons why young people apply to our center. Firstly, we offer non-formal learning environment that is a great alternative for young people who don’t know how to spend their spare time. Secondly, they are really interested and want to gain new knowledge. We check prior knowledge before they proceed to media education classes, and the overall image is shocking, as they having difficulties in naming any newspaper or radio channel, or that they are getting their news from “shamshyan.com” or from “slaq.am.”

Youth visits social networks or news sources every day not even obtaining knowledge on terminological level: calling their Facebook account “site” and say websites of movie watching when asked to name news sites. It turns out that yes, there is also a lack of media literacy among young people. To fill this gap, we visit communities and schools and talk about the importance of media education. For those who want to get more detailed and comprehensive information, we organize media literacy classes in our center, where during our meetings we cover 10 most

important topics. We try to cover media messages, how media works from inside, separate and discuss the traditional and new media, try to make media materials for different means of media, get acquainted with the ethical rules of the right to freedom of speech and the media with critical approach, because if they do not analyze news they get critically they will not understand why they decided to cover that news especially by that mean of the medium.

Do you think that media literacy should be included in mandatory curriculum in schools?

In the 20s, when cinematography became popular in France cinematography classes were taught at universities. It turns out that around 100 years ago, people realized that information that is massive and reaches all segments of society must be educated.

Nowadays, it is more urgent, perhaps a few years ago would have said will be needed to educate high school students, but it is now necessary to start from kindergarten, because 4-5-year-old child can enter YouTube and watch different videos. Therefore, children need to be informed and educated to know what and how to search for, and in their turn parent must control and oversee their child's use of Media. Having media literate society is a challenge for us and as soon we design different responses to it better result we will have.

Ararat: What are the main reasons and aims that people visit your center?

There are different reasons why people visit our center. Some of the applicants are interested in political journalism and want to become journalists, but usually we meet active youth of the communities and present the role of the media, positive and negative aspects of it and the importance of media literacy. So, usually we take the initiative. There are also some teachers who encourage their students to participate in media classes.

Is there media illiteracy especially among youth and, if yes, how can we elevate existing low rated of media illiteracy?

There is media illiteracy especially in smaller regions. For example, Ararat “Info House” is working to raise media awareness. The classes are conducted through interactive games, which mostly popular and interests schoolchildren. We invite guest speakers that work towards the development of critical thinking. Many teachers are among adult participants who pass their knowledge to their students. We provide them with the materials to use and share them (for example, during social science and informational technologies classes)

Do you think that media literacy should be included in mandatory curriculum in schools?

We think that it is necessary; because experience shows that it is easier to manipulate media illiterate users. If not mandatory class, but short-term trainings are very desirable. All the interviewees that are somehow involved in the field showed their concern about the topic. In Armenia the problem of media illiteracy exists especially in regions. Interview with a “Info House” in region gives a whole picture about the media literacy levels in regions, because experts from “Info Houses” from Martuni, Gyumri and Ararat are conducting media education in their regions, however people need to visit their organizations and apply in order to participate in the trainings. In two of the three “Info Houses” that were interviewed mentioned that they are doing the first step by some information sessions and trying to reach out to the public to participate in the media education sessions and become smart users. However, in Gyumri people are mainly applying to their center because they have already had some issues concerning media consumption or use.

Michael Yalanuzyan

Is there a lack of media literacy among youth?

Yes, there is. In my opinion it is better to observe topic from different angle. Constantly "new" youth is raising and who need to be taught how to correctly use media. The older generation also has a lack of media literacy. Even, intellectual people might have trouble with media skills. In the temporary media industry people who are unable to distinguish between factual information, emotional, manipulative, propagandistic features, and their impact on a person exposed to the wrong understanding of events, occurrences, political and economic processes, and finally, about life and the world. Literacy skills allow a person to distinguish between facts and comments, allow to understand whether this is justified or information, whether true or how to check and double-check this information. If in normal conditions, we do not give much importance to the reliability of the information media, during the internal processes, external and internal military conflicts, war and other emergency situations, information can have very serious consequences on their rights, endanger people's lives. Media Literacy Program is very important in terms of ethics, not all information that should be released, and media consumers, that is, ordinary people should know about it so that they can distinguish between facts manipulative information.

As a media education specialist what do you think are the main problems and challenges that students and teachers may face considering the fact that media education is new to the public in Armenia?

The first challenge in our society is indifference towards in media in general. People are now interested in news and that's it. That's why our mission becomes more difficult. The second challenge, taking into account my experience in teaching in collage, is low intelligence level. General low awareness, lack of desire and the ability to think, the lack of critical attitude towards the phenomena significantly complicates the teaching process. The third challenge is when in

some cases when media disseminated information clash with the student / teacher approaches. Students may have factually unjustified biases and approaches and they just disagree with the teacher. I think it's natural be implemented in such cases because the man often consumes the media, which is more consistent with his ideas. But this does not happen very often.

What is the importance of parents in this process?

Parents have very important role in child's media literacy process. Majority of children consume media after school at home or with their peers. Thus, if the parent has no idea what information their children consume and how to interpret this information, he or she will not be able to teach and help the child. I would like to mention that parents themselves often lack media literacy.. But if parents already know, understand media features, they can help to some extent the media to protect their children. For example, probably it was last year when one of our sites wrote that the end of the year will be two moons in the sky on the particular day. Children can read the information on the social network, discuss with each other, then talk about it at home. If a parent does not know that two moons is impossible and that not all of the information on the media should be taken for granted, he or she will not be able to teach their children the truth. . This is very important to pay attention in the media industry, as various types of medical, health, weight and other information exist that could harm the child's health and not only health. Raise different issues.

Karine Samvelyan

Karine Samvelyan is deputy director of a school, she is teaching physics and at the same time she is also conducting media literacy trainings.

Is there a lack of media literacy among youth, and if yes, what problems it may cause?

-Yes there is a huge lack of media literacy from using every type of media. Especially nowadays when I interact with children and adolescences I see that there is a huge illiteracy concerning the usage of online sources and it is solved in families the right usage of the online media

Informational teachers and other teachers may teach them something and it is dangerous especially when they use social medias. Sharing pictures the rules of communication, small and big conflicts and internet is not used correctly by children, when there are wonderful educational resources and the website imdroc.am is under construction and it contains all the materials they need. So children waste their time and don't use best and more useful part of the Internet to improve their skills and gain knowledge. They have also this problem with using other media.

There are many educational programs on TV, but youth is more likely to watch low quality films and TV shows that become the part of their everyday life and somehow role models. If they are media literate children are able to watch and analyze it critically, it doesn't matter if it is program on TV or an online article and even advertisement. As a result, their will not waste their time on useless things on media, that is very important. There are many educational movies, videos and games, and if we can make that stuff attractive to children and they can easily access that, they will replace all the useless things with useful and better materials. Overall, media literacy is very important and in our society there is a lack of media literacy in every type of media and this problem should be solved. There should be media trainings for all teachers and even for parents for them to have their investment in child's development.

Do you think that media education must be included in schools as a separate subject or media literacy must be included in every subject in schools, when every teacher besides their subject will refer to critical thinking?

-Both will be helpful. If every teacher during its class can teach children to critically evaluate information and distinguish true and false information, that will be guidance for them. They learn some things during informational technologies class, but if there will be a separate class --- opinion shaping and expressing that would be relevant even from kindergarten.

What is the role of parents in this process?

Role of parents is maybe the most important, however I understand them. When they are overwhelmed with their everyday burden and don't realize how much media literacy is important, they don't pay much attention to the issue and replace their peaceful times with all the risks that media can have on them. I cannot justify them and at the same time I understand that it is difficult to track their actions. Better to have

Make parents aware. They are doing it unconsciously, so we can't blame them.

Karine Harutyunyan

Karine Harutyunyan is an author of a textbook of Study of Society and she conducts trainings of teachers. She included media literacy handbook in the textbook she created and designed.