

## Introduction of Media Literacy Course in Turkey's Curriculum

Turkey, a secular state with a population of 99 per cent Muslims, is of strategic importance with its geopolitical location where West meets East. Following 1999, the year of its official candidature to the European Union, Turkey is currently a country at the doorstep of EU although various debates on her status of democratization, human rights and fundamental freedoms in the country are still ongoing.

On one hand, with the rise of globalisation, the structure of media ownership in Turkey changed under the pressure of new media technologies and commerce. The traditional media owners totally disappeared from the sector. The new media moguls have started to use their newspapers and TV channels for their own benefits focusing on 'power' and 'profit'. CEO's of these corporations were working for these moguls shared the same benefits since they mostly came from the elite class. This *metamorphosis* led to sensationalism, manipulation, disinformation and misinformation in the news media, for the very best interest of the media conglomerates instead of citizens' interest.

On the other hand the current Turkish media, in particular popular TV has a very big influence on the daily life of citizens. According to a study by UNESCO in 2005, Turkey is the second country in the world watching TV on an average 3.5 hours per day. Turkey has directly passed to the audio-visual culture without completing the transition process from the oral to the written culture. As a result, the circulation of newspapers is quite low (4–4.5 million per day) for a population of 75 million. Even though the population of the country has doubled since 1960, this rate has stood still. Although more than 300 private TV stations (24 of them are nation-wide), more than 1000 private radio stations and 700 newspapers exist, this does not signify that there is pluralism within the media. There are mainly four big groups controlling the mainstream media, which do not give any chance for local ones to survive. Turkish media is over-dependent on technology and importation is required to replace by investing on qualified human resources and productivity.

Turkish citizens are predictably in need of critical approach in such media environment. However, they do not have knowledge about the new media ownership structure, the close relationships between the media-politics-business world and the deconstruction of the messages.

Since Turkey is still a developing country with a high degree of dependency on the global media, Turkish citizens' increasing level of critical thinking and self-

expression through the media literacy would be the core element to expand the culture of democracy.

The steps made in recent days by The Turkish Ministry of National Education and Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTUK) for introducing media education into the primary schools' seven grade curriculum are encouraging efforts toward a "media literate society" and a robust democracy.

### A Research On The Effects of Media Literacy Course on the Teachers and Students

In Turkey in 2006–2007 media literacy education started in five primary schools selected arbitrarily for testing purposes. In addition, this course will be given as an elective course in the curriculum of 2007–2008 at all primary schools sixth, seventh or eighth classes.

At this point, there is a very important question: "Who will teach the media literacy lessons?" The Ministry of Education assigned social science teachers to give these lessons.

The main question is if the social science teachers do have enough skill and knowledge to teach media literacy. Teaching media literacy requires a specific training on subjects like main structures of media, historical backgrounds of media, theories and effects of media and the methods for reading a text in terms of semiotic analyses, rhetoric and other related subjects. It is obvious that the specialists graduated from faculty of communication have this knowledge and instruments to teach media literacy in an efficient way. Therefore letting social science teachers to teach media literacy courses will raise the risk factor of a possible unsuccessful project.

Among the five pilot schools, the researcher could only access one of them which is located in Istanbul. The reason why the researcher could not access the others was due to not being able to obtain permission by the Ministry of Education.

In order to achieve realistic results, in-depth interviews especially focusing on the key difficulties regarding teaching capability, content, methods and instruments used in this project. In addition to that, surveys were conducted to the 38 students of media literacy classes to determine the effects such as for example any positive changes on their behavior and or on their thinking style.



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### Some Results of In-Depth Interviews with the Teachers

- 1- According to findings of this research, both teachers believed in the necessity of implementation of media literacy course in the Turkish education curriculum. They said that children gained different perspectives through the lectures that support them to increase their ability to distinguish between reality and imagination. Teachers believe that this course encourages children to analyze the media in a critical way and learn to protect themselves of negative effects of media (considering TV, internet, newspapers as media) while eliminating ads, movie, magazines, books.
- 2- On the other hand, both teachers failed in defining the elements of media and functions of the media.
- 3- Surprisingly, both teachers didn't recommend any other book than the course book. They only suggested the official web site of RTÜK for children. They are also not aware of the difference between evaluation and media criticism.
- 4- When they were asked to make comments and suggestion about media literacy lesson in terms of increasing its efficiency, one of them said that lectures should generalize to other schools for the future but before this, teachers should take education and then teach the children. The other teacher said that in order to increase effectiveness of lectures it is necessary to link with media outlets and use technological apparatus otherwise it might be only a "read and explain" method.
- 5- When they were asked if they were interested in media before the lectures one of them said that she was interested in media just as the people in the street. Also she added that before the lectures she did not know the technical terms concerning the media and learned them while teaching students during the lessons. For instance she claimed that she had never heard the name and meaning of "fake event" before the lectures.
- 6- Both of them have not taken any media lessons during their education and they added that the ministry of education provided "in house training" course for social science teachers prior to this project only for a week.

One of them claimed that she had difficulties during the lectures for this reason she had a hard time preparing the lessons by visiting the relating web-sites

### Some Interesting Results of the Survey Conducted with The Students

Among the 32 of students 51.4% of them answered that their most favorite web site was Google. In fact, their response shows that the students are not aware of the

differences between web site and search engine although they have been attending media literacy lessons. Also, 18.9% of them prefer YouTube and 8.1% Game sites, 2.7% Newspaper, Wikipedia and their schools' web sites. Also, surprisingly none of them preferred any web sites that related to media literacy. Moreover, we have mentioned in the previous parts that teachers claimed TV and internet were the most effective media and also claimed that students have started to assess media in a broad perspective. The data shows that there is an inconsistency between students attitudes and teachers assessments in terms of Internet.

It is interesting that the rates of media literacy class students who cannot exactly define internet literacy are considerably high. 91.9% of them have not heard the term of internet literacy before and 8.1% defined it as an "education" method that helps to distinguish between good and bad in terms of Internet.

To sum up, The hypothesis of this study was primarily : Although it is a positive attitude that ministry of education has begun giving media literacy education at primary schools, which will have several positive effects on children, there is a possibility of failure of the project since the lessons are given by social science teachers and not by specialists of communication. The research findings verify the hypothesis.

### Internet Use in Turkey: Some Comments On the Use of Appropriation of Internet Literacy Handbook in Turkey

The use of the Internet in Turkey is still in the infancy period. Only %8.66 of the households and %19.93 of individuals have internet Access and it's hard to say that Turkey has become an internet society with 5 million PC users. Besides, the advances of Internet infrastructure are very slow and Turkey hasn't still established the legal background demanded by Internet.

Freedom of communication and press are guaranteed by the Turkish Constitution. (Articles 22 and 28). These freedoms can only be restricted on the grounds of; national security, public order, preventing crimes, public health and public morals. Turkish Criminal Code, Law No. 5237 provides; legal basis for combatting illegal and harmful content on the Internet under the same provisions with media and press. The definition of "by means of media and press" also covers the Internet (Article 6/1-g).

Turkish Criminal Code prohibits; Child pornography (Article 226), Propaganda of terrorist organizations (Article 220/8), Interception of communication (Article 132) and Prevention of communication (Article 124).

A protocol has been signed between the Ministry of National Education and Türk Telekom in order to block

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such contents of pornography, terror, drug usage, weapons, gambling, violence, through a filter mechanism.

The Circular on Internet Ethics (No.2004/61) issued by the Ministry of National Education supports widespread usage of Internet and new technologies at schools, emphasizes safer use of Internet, gives teachers and administrators responsibility to take care about students to use Internet in a safe and proper way, introduces a guideline or "code of conduct on Internet" which defines practical usage of Internet in a safe and useful way. Students are informed about negative effects of pornographic contents by their instructors.

Within the framework of studies carried out under the Council of Europe, "The Internet Literacy Handbook" has been prepared by the Group of Specialists on Human Rights in the Information Society. The Handbook has been translated into Turkish and published (2000) by RTÜK (Supreme Board of Radio and Television) experts and has been sent to the Council of Europe in order to be publicised in its official web-site. The Handbook (900 of them) is being distributed to five pilot schools by Ministry of National Education and it is planned to be distributed to all the primary schools in 2007–2008 academic year. It is very useful guidebook for the students as well as for the parents and teachers. Below are some suggestions on the internet literacy handbook:

- 1- Since the booklet has been prepared by the European Council all the the links are in English and reflect the international perspective of the council. It is advisable that the links should be reviewed and analysed from the point of view of the local perspective.
- 2- Points appearing in the '**Best Practices**' section should be enriched and adopted by specific applications which are valid to the country in question.
- 3- Correlation must be established with the Human Rights element as this will allow the children to comprehend the legal aspect of the subject. During the course of the study special emphasis must be placed on simplifying the complexities of legal language into a simple and understandable language, which will enable better comprehension of the children.

## Conclusion

Turkey, a country which has not yet completed its process of democratisation, is still far away from being a media literate society with the slow advances taken for the development of its infrastructure, debates on human rights and fundamental freedoms.

In communication studies media is accepted to be transparent when there are many, often competing, sources of information; much is known about the method of information delivery and the funding of

media production is available. In Turkey, with the rise of globalization all mentioned above almost became impossible and the inevitable result of this was the misuse of the media for the very best interest of the media conglomerates instead of citizens' interest. This process led to sensationalism, disinformation/ misinformation and most of all it violated the public's right to know. Recently, concepts such as objectivity, independence, balanced reporting and impartiality are not as well accepted or even understood among information consumers and media professionals in Turkey.

In such a media environment, Turkey is in a great need of increasing the level of Turkish citizens' critical thinking and self-expression through media literacy. Recently, concepts such as objectivity, independence, balanced reporting and impartiality are not as well accepted or even understood among information consumers and media professionals in Turkey.

It is obvious that if media literacy is supported by civic journalism and by Ramonet's suggestion of Media Watch Global, the result will be more efficient to help to implement free, democratic structures and allow to active participation and social justice. Recently we have established (last April) Media Watch House in Turkey, which is going to operate as a fifth estate. It will decipher all the disinformation, misinformation bombarded by the mainstream media. I believe that these are very important steps to become a media literate country.

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**Prof. Dr. Yasemin İnceoğlu**, University of Galatasaray- Faculty of Communications, İstanbul-Turkey