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Navigating the Evolution of Media Education in Romania: A Critical Analysis of Teachers' Professional Training Programs

Ileana ROTARU [1]

[1] West University of Timişoara, Romania;
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8853-7050;
ileana.rotaru@e-uvt.ro

Abstract: *The rise of the Sars-Cov-19 pandemic and the ongoing war in Ukraine have intensified discussions about media literacy within Romanian public discourse. The rapid spread of communication issues such as disinformation, information overload, and social media echo chambers has highlighted the global community's struggle with these challenges, lacking adequate skills and tools. This paper examines the limited media education initiatives in Romania's non-governmental sector amidst a broader decline in media literacy, as reflected by Romania's low ranking in the 2023 European Media Literacy Index. With Romania scoring 32 points, significantly behind Finland's 74 points, there is a marked absence of clear objectives in national policies aimed at improving media literacy. The paper analyzes media education programs for teachers in Romania from 2017 to 2022, focusing on aspects such as program providers, curriculum content, duration, and competencies. These findings not only explain the current state of media education in Romania but also offer a foundation for integrating scattered local initiatives into a coherent national framework aimed at strengthening media literacy education across the country.*

Keywords: *media education, teachers' professional training, educational service providers, media education initiatives.*

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Introduction. "*What is media literacy for?*"

With the rise and widespread transmission of the Sars-Cov-19 virus and the ongoing war in Ukraine, the debates around media literacy have surged in both frequency and intensity within Romanian public space. The unprecedented proliferation of communication-related issues (information overload, disinformation, cyberhate, social media eco-chambers etc.) has brought to the forefront the profound impact and pervasive consequences that global community members have had to grapple with, lacking the necessary tools. In the context of information eco-system, a concentrated blend of the most advanced elements (of distortion, disruption and distraction) has left indelible marks on the societal fabric. The effects on society, including the Romanian one, are powerful, intense and on long term (Bargaoanu et al, 2023). As a remedy, media education helps individuals navigate the complexities of modern media landscapes. It equips them with critical thinking skills to discern between reliable and unreliable sources of information, thus mitigating the spread of misinformation and propaganda. By promoting media literacy, it empowers individuals to make informed decisions about their media consumption, thereby contributing to healthier lifestyles and improved physical health. Moreover, media education acts as a preventive measure by instilling awareness and understanding of media influence from an early age. By educating individuals about media manipulation techniques, it reduces susceptibility to manipulation and exploitation. In the context of civil rights, media education encourages individuals to question media representations and challenge stereotypes, promoting inclusivity and diversity. It fosters an understanding of the media's role in shaping public opinion and advocating for social justice issues. Additionally, media education enhances citizenship by equipping individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to participate actively in democratic processes. It encourages critical engagement with media content related to politics, governance, and civic life. By promoting media literacy as a core component of citizenship education, it empowers individuals to contribute meaningfully to society (European Commission, 2024). Consequently, in this context, the ability to assess the relevance and quality of information and to critically address it, becomes an essential skill for 21st-century citizens that are actively involved in the participatory culture (Hobbs, 2011).

The fragility of the Romanian educational system and its connection to the social context (in connection with poverty, digital divide, illiteracy to name just few) arises from various factors, including the insufficient structural and technological support in schools, the absence of high-speed internet

access at home and in private spaces, and the escalating duration of internet usage (Ayllón et al., 2024). When examining the structural and technological aspects, it becomes evident that the Romanian school system falls significantly below acceptable standards in terms of technology access and utilization within classrooms and educational resources (Velicu, 2021). Rather than being a tangible reality, it appears more as an ideal. The digital divide becomes more pronounced when considering marginalized communities, Roma communities and rural areas (Velicu et al., 2022).

In both rural and urban marginalized areas, the absence of access to technological infrastructure creates a formidable barrier that profoundly impacts the lives of children, leaving lasting imprints on their future participation in community life and civic engagement within participative democracies (Digital Economy and Society Index, 2022). The second aspect pertains to the socio-cultural context, where the label of "digital natives" excludes a specific group of young individuals, relegating them to the category of "digital immigrants" alongside their parents and other family members. Consequently, their access to knowledge, information, and resources is significantly compromised.

Lastly, the discussion on the educational context highlights the pivotal role of critical citizenship within the Romanian national training curricula. In essence, digitalization was envisioned to enhance access to education and foster quality learning as solutions to some of the aforementioned challenges. Regrettably, the current situation contradicts these expectations and necessitates focused attention and corrective measures (Bargaoanu et al., 2023) in order to address a series of challenges: the overwhelming amount of information sources; the growing concerns about information disorder (Wardle & Derakshan, 2017); a strong demand for accountability and transparency from media organizations and platforms. Currently, a favorable moment has emerged for media education concepts to confront the trust crisis by empowering individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to navigate the complexities of the modern media landscape and make informed decisions about the information they use and find. With a decline in public trust in Romanian institutions, including both the media and the public sector, there is a noticeable surge in partisan polarization, an increase in disinformation campaigns, and frequent attacks on the press by political elites (Bargaoanu et al., 2023). Educators specializing in media education need to respond to the evolving landscape of credibility in a post-truth era (Rotaru, 2021). This involves reassessing fundamental concepts such as truth, authority, and trust, and conducting analyses of media structures and power dynamics (Ranschaert, 2020; Hobbs, 2019). We posit that the human resource, encompassing

teachers, experts, and young students, plays a pivotal role in implementing training curricula and cultivating civic citizenship skills. As the primary education provider, schools have the potential to effectuate a shift from passive learning to active engagement, transforming young individuals into active citizens and reinforcing participative democracy (Rotaru, 2019).

Mapping Romania's Media Education Initiatives

In this context, media education is not just a necessity, but it is positioned as a crucial element for survival and a moral imperative on the society level. Despite a decline in the media literacy competence of Romanians, as indicated by the 2023 European Media Literacy Index placing Romania in the 4th cluster with 32 points compared with the first place, with 74 points for Finland, there is a noticeable absence of clear and robust targets in the strategic and public national policies aimed at elevating and enhancing this competency (Media Literacy Index Report, 2023).

The first purpose of this paper is to comprehensively outline the fragile initiatives originating from the non-governmental sector in Romania concerning media education.

In 2004, Romania introduced a school curriculum initiative for Media Competence, dedicated to high school students and situated within the "Man and Society" curriculum area, continuing an earlier initiative from 1999. This aimed to foster civic education through media engagement and to bridge the gap between schools and real-world experiences, promoting freedom of expression, positive interpersonal relationships, valuing individual potential, self-confidence, and the development of critical thinking (Ministry of Education and Research and National Curriculum Council, 2004). During the period 2014-2020, Romania implemented several public policy documents and initiatives originating from the European level, including strategic documents such as the Digital Agenda for Europe. In 2015, the National Strategy on the Digital Agenda for Romania - 2020 (Ministry for Information Society, 2015, 15) reported that "90% of households in Romania are covered by broadband, 78% of rural households have access to broadband, [and] 45% of Romanians use the Internet weekly, compared to a European average of 72%." The same report indicated that Romanian civil society has become the primary driver in initiating and developing media literacy projects; however, these projects have encountered obstacles related to insufficient funding, the absence of national policies in this area, and limited public support.

A similar perspective is provided by the report "Mapping of Media Literacy Practices and Actions in EU-28," produced under the auspices of the European Audiovisual Observatory (2016). This report details media literacy

projects and practices in all EU member states, focusing on initiatives delivered through electronic communication networks but excluding press, radio, and offline media. The report considered studies on media literacy actions conducted in formal institutional settings, such as schools and other educational establishments. Over the 15 years preceding the report, civil society was responsible for initiating the majority of projects, targeting diverse groups with varying abilities. During this period, only 19 media literacy projects were identified, and their impact was relatively low given the number and scale of actors involved: of the 11 key actors, 7 were civil society representatives, 2 were public authorities, 1 was an academic, and 1 was a regulator. The report also mentions two main networks in the field of media literacy: *MediaWise* and *Sigur.info*, both belonging to the non-governmental sector.

In Romania, efforts to promote media and digital literacy among citizens are primarily undertaken by non-governmental organizations, initiative groups, or other private entities that prioritize the development of basic skills needed by all members of society. These efforts are joined, in specific situations, by researchers, schools, libraries, activists, news organizations, technology companies, private companies, and, only in some cases, by governmental institutions (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Digitization, or their related agencies).

Most media literacy projects developed in Romania over the past 25 years originate from civil society. At the level of public authorities, the Ministry of Education, in particular, launched a concrete initiative for the introduction of an optional subject in the field of digital literacy in 2022, taking into account the latest recommendations at the European level: the Council of Europe recommendation of 22 May 2018 and the Communication from the European Commission to the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of the Regions on the Action Plan for Digital Education (Ministry of Education, 2021). Although this initiative is two years old since its publication, the optional subject has not been implemented in all secondary schools, as many initiatives in this field continue to be driven by civil society, in collaboration with educational institutions, or through teacher training programs.

The second and main purpose of our study is to scrutinize the evolution of media education training programs for teachers implemented in Romania between 2017 and 2022 (with some still ongoing). We believe that the implementation and formal introduction of a media education curriculum within the national framework can address and mitigate some of the challenges mentioned above.

Our analysis will focus on key aspects such as the actors involved (providers), the content/curriculum (including the type and perspective on the media education concept), duration, and competencies. The findings not only offer a potential explanation for the current state of media education training in Romania but also serve as a foundational starting point for aggregating and synthesizing local, individual initiatives into a cohesive national framework.

Empirical research: Objectives, sampling and methodological approach

Based on a theoretical framework of media education concepts and pragmatics of training (Buckingham, 2019; Hobbs, 2019; Livingstone, 2008), we aim at analysing the current media education training programs implemented by the experts of civil society in an effort to tackle the societal challenges mentioned before. Our research explores the answers to the next two main questions: What are the core directions that media education training programs follow in Romania? What is their common media education understanding in the perspective of the media literacy competencies they aim to train and/or practice?

In our attempt to map the Romanian situation, our sample includes only the media education continuing programs that were officially recognized by the Romanian Ministry of Education based on a process of accreditation (for scientific content, didactic methodologies and human resources expertise) and a set of rules and legal framework set for professional training of the teachers of the undergraduate level for the educational providers of non-formal training (life long education). Due to the fact that this process implies a certain legal set of steps, the analyses of a national commission of experts (from undergraduate level and from higher education), the educational providers that successfully pass the accreditation process offer for their training program a certain number of educational credits (ECTS) to be awarded to their graduates. During the period 2010 – 2017 there were not listed in the National Register of Education Services Providers of training programs in media education (or any other related field). In the period 2017 – 2022, a number of 6 training programs were accredited and listed accordingly in the National Register. Since 2023, a new law of education has come into force and new methodologies for programs of continuing training have been adopted. Nevertheless, some of the media education (or related field) already recognized programs are still actively implemented as they are usually approved by the national commission (mentioned before) for a 4 years period. Other training programs in media education have been implemented

in schools (for teachers and students) and are producing effects in the period 2010-2023, of civil society, of universities or other educational actors, due to different non-refundable projects or partnerships, but they were mostly depending on their period of financing (the constrains of funder/sponsor) and they did not apply for accreditation from Ministry of Education. These initiatives, as encouraging and pioneering as they should be considered, were framed by contextual partnerships with educational stakeholders on a local level (schools, regional educational inspectorate etc.) and had succeeded in some extent to reach certain targets: human resources (raising awareness on the media education/ media literacy concept and skills); educational resources (diverse textbooks, lessons plans, innovative didactic strategies); and curricular (non-compulsory learning modules in some schools, diversity of non-formal activities, extra-curricular projects for students). These efforts have been driven by local, innovative approaches initiated by dedicated teachers and/or with the support of media education civil society organizations as promoters. They did not receive a proper recognition by the national authorities and they have not been encouraged to be continued on a strategic and public national policy.

This analysis is limited to the six training programs (from 2017-2022) listed in the National Register of Education Services Providers for training programs targeting didactic personnel at the undergraduate level. Official recognition by the Romanian Ministry of Education, as evidenced by their accreditation, served as the sole criterion for inclusion in our sample.

In terms of actors (providers), five of the media education training programs have been actively promoted and implemented by NGOs (civil society organizations involved in non-formal education and/or in running media literacy/digital literacy campaigns: Kreativ Research Association, Save the Children Romania, Center for Independent Journalism, Eurocommunication Association, ProEuroCons Association). One program consists of a partnership between a civil society organization (ActiveWatch) and a public educational institution that conducts training programs for pre-university education staff.

Although other research and analyses (Vos & Terryin, 2013; Mapping of Media Literacy Practices and Actions in EU-28, 2016) have mapped the landscape of media education initiatives in Romania, they did not specifically analyze the training programs exclusively accredited by the Ministry of Education for teachers in pre-university education.

To address our research inquiries, we conducted a comparative content analysis of the six programs based on three core dimensions of their curriculum:

a. Firstly, we examined the general program description and objectives as outlined by the providers (officially recognized by the Romanian Ministry of Education).
b. Secondly, we delved into the topics and subthemes of the media education programs to assess their core focus areas, aligning them with the Media Literacy Skills framework outlined by the EU Commission. This framework encompasses aspects such as Use/Access, Critical Understanding/Analysis/Evaluation, and Communication/Creation, within the context of media pedagogy or/and media education strategies (Buckingham, 2019).
c. Finally, employing a qualitative content analysis, we mapped the criteria for media competence using the personal and social competences framework of media literacy (EAVI, 2011), categorizing them into actions, individual skill dimensions, and associated operational objectives.

Data were collected from publicly available information on the providers' websites and supplemented by voluntary contributions shared with us for research purposes. All programs underwent anonymization in adherence to professional ethics; our aim is not to critique the efforts of these organizations in promoting media education but rather to map and analyze the current understanding of media education within the training programs implemented in Romania.

Findings and discussions

Core directions of the media education programs

According to our data, most of the programs followed a modular training format, ranging from 40 to 100 hours. Four of these programs consider a medium duration of 60 hours of training sessions as sufficient to cover the teaching, learning, and evaluation processes. From the national reviewers' perspective, these programs are accredited for a period of four years, which is the maximum duration allowed by the national legal framework. The Commission's decision was based on the relevance and importance of the training domain (media education programs/new fields of education) when granting this period and the associated professional credits.

From the perspective of the target audience—undergraduate teachers—some programs offer broad coverage (e.g., P6), while others focus on specific categories (e.g., P4). The remaining programs provide opportunities for a wide range of teachers to access training, regardless of their teaching level or specialty. Several factors may explain these variations:

constraints in funding applications that providers must consider and the providers' organizational capacity to implement training (human resources, technical resources, and financial support). Within the implementation context (targeting educational institutions such as schools, auxiliary, or management educational institutions), some training programs are designed for specific geographical areas, while others are open to the entire Romanian territory.

The general aim of the media education programs, as publicly stated, is to provide training and develop skills, competencies, and knowledge about media (content) and media usage (practice), both as tools (e.g., employing new technologies for creative learning and fostering a safe online environment) and as didactic strategies within the educational process (referring to certain practices in various specialties and school management). The overall orientation leans toward addressing "media education pedagogy pitfalls" (Buckingham, 2019), emphasizing both a protectionist approach and counter-propaganda strategies. Particular attention is given to a student-centered approach that positions students as main actors in the educational process, thereby enhancing their agency for active participation in mediatized lives and society throughout a life-long learning process (non-formal education).

Another related issue is the type of training provided: face-to-face or blended learning. This aspect helps explain the mandatory trends of training programs that were accredited during the COVID-19 pandemic when certain methodologies and laws were adopted to address the challenges posed by the pandemic and to meet the increasing demands from teachers (as well as from students and parents) for understanding media processes alongside general media consumption. Consequently, some training programs were forced to cease face-to-face implementation, while others adapted their training formats and transitioned to online platforms (as indicated by the Ministry of Education's adapted accreditation methodologies), and some were specifically designed for delivery through online educational services.

Two out of six training programs offer open access to textbooks and open educational resources for teachers enrolled in the programs or those interested in self-education. The textbooks used in the training programs are developed by experts serving as trainers, based on their understanding and perspective on media education and mandatory needs analysis research conducted on the targeted teachers by the educational service providers (NGOs, in this case). One of the selection criteria for a training program to be accredited by the National Commission is to demonstrate a legitimate need and a scientific basis for a specific type of educational intervention. Following this analysis, the syllabuses of the program are developed, including examples

and mandatory samples from two courses (parts of the textbooks provided for the trainees).

From a human resources perspective, the training programs are evaluated based on the expertise and education level of the trainees (including their scientific records, experience in other teacher training programs related to the field, formal studies, degrees and certificates, and applied experience in the field, etc.). Three of the media education training programs enhance this aspect by including university-level professors (holding a PhD in communication sciences or teaching in the domain of communication sciences). Two of the training programs are staffed by media experts and professional journalists, in conjunction with undergraduate-level teaching experts. One educational service provider offered a special training program for its own teaching staff and self-certified its trainers for the media education program they implement.

In terms of costs, except for one program (P5), media education training providers do not charge enrolled teachers any participation fees. The educational providers cover their expenses through various means, including non-repayable EU project funds or their own finances (sponsorships, voluntary contributions, private partnerships, etc.). Financial sustainability represents a sensitive aspect of training programs. Although some groups, such as teachers from rural or marginalized communities, may receive support during certain periods, there is no long-term guarantee for ongoing training availability during the entire four-year accreditation period and NGO activity. This situation poses challenges for the non-governmental sector in securing financial support for their media education training and promoting media education programs in schools. As private institutions, they must pay a fee to the Ministry of Education for analyzing submitted programs.

Table 1. An overview of the Romanian media education training programs for teachers recognised by the Ministry of Education (2017-2022)

Program 1	**General aim** Training and development of pre-university teachers in the skills of analysis, access, evaluation and use (production) of media content through the use of smart technologies (ICT) and the internet (social media) in a way that improves classroom teaching, as well as innovative in the development of new skills (including non-formal education).					
	Hours/ ECTS	**Target audience**	**Duration**	**Area**	**Fees**	**Training format**
	100h/25	teachers & auxiliary teaching staff in pre-university education	4 years	local/ regional	none	face to face
Program 2	**General aim:** Training and development of teachers in pre-university education in digital competence, i.e. the skills of useful, safe and creative use of the Internet and smart technologies (NTIC) in the teaching activity, as well as in the whole educational process.					
	Hours/ ECTS	**Target audience**	**Duration**	**Area**	**Fees**	**Training format**
	60/15	teachers & auxiliary teaching staff in pre-university education	4 years	national	none	Face to face/ blended
Program 3	**General aim:** Development of media skills of teachers of Romanian language and literature and related subjects, necessary in the learner-centered education process; Development of teaching skills for the inclusion of media education concepts and elements in the teaching/learning of Romanian language and literature and related subjects.					
	Hours/ ECTS	**Target audience**	**Duration**	**Area**	**Fees**	**Training format**
	60/15	languages teachers and school librarians	4 years	national	none	blended
Program 4	**General aim:** Training and development of staff in pre-university education through the acquisition of knowledge and skills both for the identification and analysis of problematic content (fakenews, disinformation), but also for the acquisition of approaches to fight disinformation and maintain security in the online environment. Use these skills in classroom teaching.					
	Hours/ ECTS	**Target audience**	**Duration**	**Area**	**Fees**	**Training format**
	60/15	teachers & auxiliary teaching staff in pre-university education	4 years	regional	none	blended

Program 5	**General aim**: not available					
	Hours/ ECTS	**Target audience**	**Duration**	**Area**	**Fees**	**Training format**
	60/15	teachers & auxiliary teaching staff in pre-university education	4 years	national	65 euro/pers	blended
Program 6	**General aim**: training and development of the competences of teachers and management, guidance and control staff in pre-university education in order to implement the new national and European requirements on media education in pre-university education institutions.					
	Hours/ ECTS	**Target audience**	**Duration**	**Area**	**Fees**	**Training format**
	40/12	teaching staff in pre-university education + management, guidance and control staff in pre-university education	3 years	local/ regional	none	face to face

Source: Author's analysis

The general topics of the media education training programs are described in the Table1. The trainings are divided by educational modules setting the frame of the entire program direction. Each module represents a learning unit composed by theoretical dimension and an applied one (exercises, debates, study cases, individual/group learning and projects). 1 or 2 hours of evaluation are allocated to each module and a final evaluation consisted in a practical portfolio are enclosed within the training program. The proportion of applied training hours must be 2/3 higher than the theoretical one. The distributions of hours of training and the topics of the modules represents the educational providers specificity and they give the general frame of the training programs directions. In this sense, we observe a large freedom of orientation of the media education understanding and some specific pitfalls in particular cases. There are several aspects we can detect: media pedagogy and how media content and practices can be thought and address within the entire bag of tools of pedagogical strategies (P1, P2, P3, P5, P6); media education as curriculum, understanding media and teaching about the media (P1, P3, P5, P6); risks and defensive approach of the media influence, effects and impact on personal and on society level (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5); role and place of the media in democratic societies, the civic and participatory component (P1, P2, P3, P5).

From a general perspective, some educational providers explicitly address the protectionist view of unsafe and unhealthy media influence and behavior (Buckingham, 2019). This viewpoint serves as the primary interpretative paradigm for the utility of media education and embodies the top-down approach to the relationship between teachers and students (as members of Generation Z/digital generation). Within this framework, media education training programs respond to the needs and challenges of teachers as representatives of the adult segment of society rather than the younger generations. The essential dimensions of media education pedagogy (reading literacy, writing literacy, and contextual analysis) are thoroughly addressed in a few training modules. Meanwhile, issues such as children's rights in the digital environment, children's uses and gratifications, and children's influences and behaviors related to and within the media are overlooked (Media Literacy Index Report, 2023). While the younger generation has been transitioning between different types of media, social media platforms, and genres, they have continually learned to engage with media according to their diverse needs in a converged and ubiquitous manner.

Table 2. A comparative perspective of the Romanian media education training programs – teaching modules

P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
Media Pedagogy. Strategies and models for analyse, access and evaluate media content	Institutional intervention and the partnership school-family - community	What is media education	Digital education	Media in school and in the contemporary society	Media. Instrument and practices. The role of a spokesman/ PR officer
Using media and new media within the learning activities	Online safety	Rights and responsibilities of the content media creator and of the receiver	Fighting disinformation	Mass-media, the message and social responsibility	Media. Strategies of responsible use. Instruments and examples
Risks of the communication pathologies	Digital citizenship and media education	Deconstructing the media message	Information risks in the online environment	Commercials	
Media Literacy. Producing and creating media content	Media resources within educational process	The journalist role within the society		The consumer of media	

		The role of audience. The editors' independency		Media education in school	
		Internet and social media			
		Disinformation			
		Media Education Practice			
100 hours	60 hours	60 hours	60 hours	60 hours	40 hours

Source: Author's analysis

Media education from theory to practice in Romania

In most commonly used definitions of media education/media literacy, there are 4 pillars system to measure different levels of media literacy: access, analyse, evaluate and produce. These pillars have been generally agreed upon since 1992 (Aufderheide, 1993) and by the European Charter of Media Literacy (Bachmair & Bazalgette, 2007).

Potter (2011) suggests that while there isn't a singular definition of media literacy, it typically encompasses the next key dimensions: access and utilization, a critical comprehension of various media facets and content production, and engagement in communication media. The European Commission Recommendation (Recommendation 2009/625/EC) aligns with this perspective, defining media literacy as "the ability to access the media, to understand and critically evaluate different aspects of the media and media content and to create communications in a variety of contexts ".

On a European scale, two studies commissioned by the European Commission are noteworthy, particularly the research led by Celot and Pérez Tornero (2009), followed by subsequent efforts by the Danish Technological Institute (DTI) and the European Association for Viewers Interests (EAVI) (2011). These studies were commissioned in response to the European Commission's directive to create a tool for assessing media literacy levels across various European Union (EU) countries. (Pereira & Moura, 2019). According to Livingstone et al. (2012,4), '*there remains little agreement about media literacy or how to measure it and, therefore, little evidence that efforts to improve it are effective'*. Despite the fact there is a common agreement on the difficulty to assess and measure media literacy due to a lack of consensus and, of course, the intrinsic complexity of the concept, some attempts have been made over the years (Pereira & Moura, 2019; Mackenzie, 2023).

Due to this fact, we frame our analysis on the set of indicators provided by EAVI (2011) and considered the model as a frame to better comprehend the media competence aimed by the media education training programs, not as a rigid tool for fitting in. We emphasize that some of the themes are more fluid and dynamic and some of the directions that the media educations training providers are interconnected and in reality, the training modules may differ or suffer different kinds of updates due to the teachers' needs or the trainers experience. The modular approach on long-term research within EU member states (EAVI, 2011) the core media literacy list of indicators has been gradually developed. More than that, the model reflects a certain consensus on the media literacy skills and on the media education conceptual framework, all being operationalized in a comprehensive set of items. The importance of this model, consists not only in addressing the challenges of comprising the individual level indicators (access, use, analyze and create), but it sets the importance of the contextual factors that affects the individual in the media environment, including media literacy as a promotor of advancing collective intelligence, cultural and political participation, economic progress and general good. In short, media literacy is an outcome of individual and national contexts (EAVI, 2011,6) and it represents the synthesis of a long tradition hermeneutics about media literacy and media education (Fedorov, 2011).

Within the above-mentioned frame, we develop our instrument of analyses in 2 types of competences: personal and social competences (EAVI, 2010, 34) and 3 types of subsequent actions: use and critical thinking (for personal competences) and communicate (for social competences).

When discussing its utility (*use*), it pertains to the accessibility of media and typically encompasses more than just possessing the necessary tools for access; it also involves possessing the fundamental skills to interact with the media platform for personal purposes and needs. Furthermore, it requires a critical understanding of technical issues beyond basic functionalities. Our analysis indicates that all six training programs considered this criterion relevant to be covered within their modules and the competencies they aimed to develop. Some programs notably emphasized the interplay between media as a tool and didactic resources as aids, including procedural knowledge and the transition between devices, platforms, and interfaces, which are integral to learning activities. This emphasis may align with the trend of media convergence and the inherent connection between media and digital skills characteristic of Web 3.0.

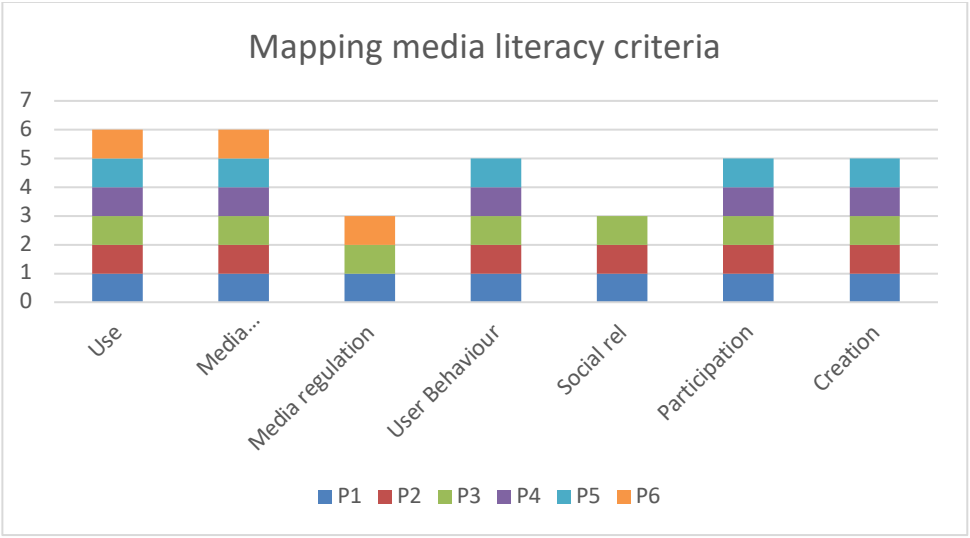
A critical understanding comprises a composite skill set aimed at analyzing and assessing various dimensions. It consists of three key components: comprehension of media content and operations, familiarity with

media and its regulatory frameworks, and understanding of user behavior. While the first aspect involves processes such as coding and decoding, critical evaluation, exploration, and information retrieval across all six training programs, the exploration of media regulation is addressed only in half of them. In these instances, deeper exploration or exhaustive coverage of regulations, rules, and media production rights, as well as conceptual frameworks from media studies, are undertaken. This discrepancy may be attributed to factors such as the trainers' expertise in this area and the teachers' level of interest in legal frameworks and regulations. According to Freedman (2017), media regulations has been traditionally oriented towards sector specific domains (advertising, media institutions, journalists etc.). and it still may be regarded as a fluid, dynamic field to be addressed within the trainings due to possible uncertainties about the regulations on new technologies and internet (e.g. AI and internet of things), the convergence of print and digital media, the public/private EU debates on media and big tech companies (e.g. Digital Services Act and Digital Markets Act). Similarly, akin to the emphasis on skills related to media content and functioning, user behavior patterns are incorporated into five out of six training programs. The sixth program, which consists of only two training modules, does not include the development of information utilization strategies.

The social competencies, specifically communication, primarily involve active participation, creation, and production of media content, or engagement with media. In essence, it pertains to the interaction between individuals established through personal media usage. This competency is categorized into three main actions: fostering social relations, engaging in the public sphere, and creating content. While the latter two actions are strongly emphasized in five of the training programs, covering topics such as appropriate interaction with multiple institutions, self-identity, strategic media use, sharing common social or personal models, collaborative work, content creation, and problem-solving, the first action, social relations, is mentioned in only three out of six training programs. Skills such as staying updated on media trends and maintaining contacts through media and social platforms are less frequently addressed. However, we believe that the structure and content of the modules, along with shared information, do not definitively indicate a lack of emphasis on social relations skills, as these skills may be covered in a cross-cutting manner within other actions.

Therefore, we conclude that the framework of media competence mapping reflects the main views embraced by the media education training providers and these skills and actions are subsequent to both EC definitions and media education general understanding of the concept.

Figure 1. An overview of the media literacy aspects enclosed in the Romanian media education programs (2017-2022)



Source: Author's analysis

As we examined the general trends, orientations, and tensions in the development of media literacy in Romania, we cannot underline that the process of introducing media education within the educational system, represents a fresh perspective, not only considering the factors of change but also identifying stabilizing elements. These are the elements that contribute to promoting media literacy, regardless of the theoretical and practical theories and (un)developed policies.

Comparing the situation across various European countries (Mackenzie, 2023; Pereira & Moura, 2019) helps identify the elements that aid in the development of media literacy in Romania as well. Felini (2014) suggests two conditions for the successful integration of media education into education: firstly, teachers themselves need to possess a certain level of media literacy and competences that they expect from their students. This involves the ability to use media effectively and to stay abreast of new trends in the field. Secondly, teachers require pedagogical and didactic expertise to provide quality teaching. To gain a better understanding of the state of media education in Romanian schools, it would be appropriate to assess and measure teachers' media literacy competences, as well as those of students. Moreover, it is essential to address media education aspects within the official and national curriculum in a transdisciplinary and compulsory manner (Rotaru, 2019). Similarly to the curriculum, when a national policy supportive of

training teachers in media education and media literacy is embraced, the conditions for the development of media competencies in the population undergo a radical transformation. Unfortunately, the current situation framed by the new Romanian Law of Education (2023) is far from this perspective despite the efforts and the points stated clearly by the civil society organizations, academics and researchers' community of the field.

Conclusions

The research explained exhaustively the parameters in which the models of media education training programs are implemented in Romania and emphasize the impact of the constant effort of the non-governmental sector makes in order to address the entire society needs on the level of media literacy and to promote media education based on their own experts and expertise/ understanding of the field (theory and practice).

The effectiveness and innovation of these training programs stem from: the integration of diverse competencies and aspects that could effortlessly establish a standard for educators' media competency training; the application methods of particular competencies supported by the four core dimensions; and the transcendence of traditional school settings through its implications. This approach fulfills a desire within contemporary pedagogy for a new educational paradigm where the influence of the school, formal education, is extended more assertively and consistently beyond its physical confines (into the family, community etc.), enabling the formulation of solutions and the adequate preparation of students to meet the challenges of society.

Although the finality of this endeavor has been (for some of the media education training providers) to build and/or to boost the resilience of the target audience to disinformation campaigns, and the general approach of the media education programs has been a protectionist one which may be considered outdated in the context of new debates (Buckingham, 2019; Hobbs, 2019), the efforts should be acknowledged and sustained by the national policies in education in a permanent, strategic, coherent and transversal manner (Rotaru, 2019, 2021).

When trying to find the answer to the question" what is media literacy for?", we agree with the one offered by Sonia Livingstone (2008) that, in the particular case analysed here, there is a need for clarifying the purposes in terms of overcoming the negative dimensions (harms/ costs) and move towards positive ones: enable benefits. With respect to this perspective, the media education training programs should be conceived on bases of personal gains: lifelong learning, well-being, active prosumer within a culture and

society of diversity of expression; citizens' benefits: active participation and ownership of fundamental democratic rights and liberties; professional and educational resources: knowledge and information, critical choices and collaborative environment.

During a period marked by social upheaval and the resurgence of extremist political factions, coinciding with ongoing elections in Romania, the imperative for implementing media education training programs becomes evident. The rise of populism and nationalism correlates strongly with pervasive poverty and the educational deficits prevalent among various social classes. While media education programs hold promise as a tool for schools and educators to promote active citizenship and uphold the true moral values of democracy, they should not be viewed as a singular or miraculous solution for preventing and mitigating the effects of media (Potter, 2011), nor should they be seen as a substitute for content regulation aimed at addressing the proliferation of communication-related issues (O'Neill, 2010).

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