Svitlana Babushko
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8348-5936
Professor, Doctor of Sciences in Pedagogy,
Head of Tourism Department,
National University of Ukraine on Physical Education and Sport,
vul. Fizkultury 1, Kyiv, Ukraine, 03150
babushko64sr@gmail.com

Myroslav Solovei
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8380-3674
Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences,
Associate Professor, Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs,
Kyiv National Linguistic University,
vul. Velyka Vasylkivska, 73, Kyiv, Ukraine, 03150
mir.solovei@gmail.com

Liudmyla Solovei
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5876-3532
Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences, Associate Professor of English
Language and Communication Department,
Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University,
Vul. Bulvarno-Kudriavska 18/2, Kyiv, Ukraine, 04053
l.solovei@kubg.edu.ua

Media And Information Literacy Upskilling For Educators At Universities: Ukrainian Context

Abstract. Currently, media and information literacy (MIL) has gained considerable significance worldwide and, particularly, in Ukraine. The efficient way to develop the MIL skills of the citizens is through well-trained educators as they help navigate in information and cyberspace. Unfortunately, the issue of MIL upskilling of university educators is paid little attention to. Hence, the researchers addressed the question to clarify the situation.

A qualitative research methodology was applied to find out the current state of the MIL level of university educators and their need for special MIL upskilling training. The methodology included several steps: literature review, preparation of interview questions, observation and communication, interaction in the professional groups of university

educators, conducting semi-structured interviews, data analysis, and working out a set of recommendations.

There are several terms that Ukrainian university educators use with the meaning of "media and information literacy" varying from "media education", and "media competency" to "media training". Besides, there are different interpretations of the term and different characteristics of a media-literate person. The interviews demonstrated that the level of MIL among most university educators is not sufficient, in their opinion. They realize the benefits of being a media literate person both for personal and professional development. And as a result, most of them are using MIL resources within non-formal and informal education systems. There are appropriate resources in the Ukrainian language to develop or master MIL skills. However, they are mostly for school teachers. Scarce resources are designed for university educators to upskill their MIL. Thus, the conclusion was made on the urgent necessity of Ukrainian university educators in providing special MIL training and in designing corresponding methodical resources. A set of recommendations on three levels (national, institutional, and personal) was offered to satisfy the demand.

Keywords: media and information literacy; university educators; Ukraine; MIL upskilling training; resources; recommendations.

Introduction. Media are present in all spheres of life. Moreover, they have become a powerful weapon as it has been proved by the ongoing war in Ukraine. The Russian Federation is widely using media in its propaganda against the Ukrainian people's desire to live independently and in confirmation with democratic and humanitarian values. Surveys show that fake news can be recognized by only a quarter of the population (Mediální, 2018). In the current situation in Ukraine, the picture looks rather threatening. That is why Ukrainians need to be armed with proper media literacy skills to navigate in the media and cyberspace safely. The role of media and information literacy (MIL) education cannot be overestimated. It is widely known that MIL education provides people with "the knowledge, insights, skills, and attitudes needed to reap the benefits of their media use as well as to protect them from potential harm" (Meeus, Ouytsel, & Driesen, 2014, p. 64).

Surely, the best way to make citizens media literate is to teach them. Pedagogues can cope with the task effectively. Thus, they need to be media literate even more than average

citizens as they share their knowledge and skills so they should be able to reinforce their MIL competencies in the students.

Unfortunately, media literacy teacher education is scant across pedagogical institutions in the world (Flores-Koulish, 2019). The same picture is typical for Ukraine, as well. Mostly, MIL training is available to future pedagogues either in few stand-alone programs or as elements of other disciplines across the curriculum. The opportunities to get MIL training are still scarce for working pedagogues (Hobbs, & Tuzel, 2015, p. 3). That is why they often face a lot of challenges, some of which can be prevented in case they have received proper MIL training. The worse situation is seen with the university educators and the opportunities to get upskilling training in media literacy.

However, the importance of developing the MIL of Ukrainian citizens is acknowledged by the government bodies. It is underlined in the Concept of Media Education in Ukraine (Kontseptsiia, 2016) which is a strategic document of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine. Much attention in the Concept has been paid to the urgent development of school teachers' media literacy leaving aside the university educators.

Unfortunately, the same can be said about international and European normative documents on media literacy and education: Paris Declaration of UNESCO on Media-Information Literacy in Digital Age (2014), Media Literacy for All by European Council (Chapman, et al, 2020), Media and Information Literacy Policy and Strategy Guidelines of UNSECO (2020) and others. The attention is mostly paid to MIL development for children and young people. If it goes about adults and their professions, school teachers, journalists, librarians, museum employees and others are mentioned (UNESCO, 2020, p. 111) except university educators.

Summing up, Ukrainian educational body authorities pay attention to the necessity of developing MIL of pedagogues. However, they do it mostly for elementary, secondary, and high school levels. The need of pedagogical staff at universities for their media literacy training is out of their attention. More factors even worsen the situation due to the beginning of the full-scale war on February 24, 2022 and the necessity to be able of

"analyzing the information and identifying hostile and propagandistic messages" (Strine, 2022) and pass it to university students. The latter are supposed to possess MIL skills. However, as the authors' experience shows, most of university students are not well media literate. Hence the task of university educators is to continue students' MIL development. To do it effectively, university educators have to possess sufficient MIL. Then, in most cases university educators acquired their education when there was no MIL training at higher educational institutions. That is why a good way out would be upskilling. Thirdly, the opportunities to develop their MIL competences within upskilling programs are scarce. Fourthly, available media literacy programs are designed exclusively for school pedagogues. They do not take into account the specificity of adult university students. In the authors' opinion, it resulted in a very critical situation when university educators have to deal with MIL challenges on their own.

Hence, the authors addressed this issue in the research and established the goal to investigate the current state of MIL upskilling for university educators in European and Ukrainian contexts.

The necessity of separate research is also caused by the scholars' belief that MIL should be appreciated "within a particular cultural and national context" (Hobbs, & Tuzel, 2015, p. 4). In this case, the Ukrainian national context.

To achieve the established purpose, the authors are planning to:

− make a literature review on the question;

− conduct qualitative research, making filed notes, systemizing and analyzing them afterward;

− work out a set of recommendations to be implemented in the educational process at Ukrainian universities;

− outline the perspectives of further research.

Literature Review. The question of teaching media literacy has been in the circle of scientific interest of international and domestic researchers. Unfortunately, it has been widely discussed only at the secondary or high school level. Recently publications on developing media literacy in kindergartens and a lot of methodic literature for children

have appeared to satisfy the needs. However, teaching MIL to university students is by far less revealed in the related literature. Vella (2012) states that universities are failing at preparing students with social media skills and few universities can boast of credit-bearing social media courses.

As the purpose of the research is to investigate Ukrainian context, in analyzing the related literature the authors will review the publications made by Ukrainian researchers.

The collective monograph "Media Literacy Studios in the European Integration Discourse of Ukraine" (Медіазнавчі студії, 2022) reveals the problems of the interaction of scientific and educational discourses, in particular in aspects of the formation of media studies as a new field of knowledge and its implementation in the educational process. The researchers familiarize readers with the principles of EU and Ukrainian education policy in the field of media and information and digital literacy of the population. They describe media and information literacy studies in the dimensions of digital library, archive and museum projects of European countries. However, the question of MIL training for university educators has not been under consideration.

V. Soshynska & Ya. Soshynska (Сошинська &Сошинська, 2022, p. 45) mention an interesting fact that only 39% of European school teachers were well prepared to use digital technologies in their professional activity before COVID-19 pandemic, not to say about the readiness level of Ukrainian teachers.

H. Horbenko and Ya. Fructova (Горбенко & Фруктова, 2020) analyze pedagogues' professional media education in leading European countries: it history and current state. The scientists point out to the contradiction between the pedagogues' tasks in developing students' MIL and the level of their readiness and preparedness to realize them. Unlike other research, this one generalizes the categories of school teachers, college and university educators under the umbrella term "pedagogues". Much attention is paid to the detailed analysis of the European practices of media education at school level. However, in short, they describe the activity of media center at Borys Hrinchenko Kyiv University, particularly its experience in conducting MIL training for pedagogues.

At the same time, it should be mentioned that not only scientific publications which reveal the MIL development or upskilling of university educators but also MIL resources for university educators are scarce. Among those ones, a strategic document that takes into account university educators' needs in MIL development should be named. That is "Media and Information Literacy" from UNESCO (Wilson, et all, 2011). The program is flexible and can be adapted for pedagogues of all education levels: school teachers, university educators and even government officials and NGO.

The most appropriate and related to the research is the upskilling training program in MIL for university scientific and pedagogical staff designed by Borys Hrinchenko Kyiv University educators (Зражевська et al, 2022). Currently, according to the Google browser search it is the only one training program for university educators to raise their MIL. The program takes into account the needs of university educators of all specialties. It is logically built and consists of 2 blocs: practical training lessons and self-study. The program designers offer to upskill university educators' MIL skills during 30 hours, 12 hours for practical training and 16 hours for self-study. The MIL upskilling is rather effective. However, it should be continued as the demand for MIL competency is increasing.

Thus, there is a problem of systemizing and agreeing the activity of researchers, pedagogues and other stakeholders in analyzing the needs of university educators for MIL and providing them with proper methodical help and resources.

Methodology. *Theoretical Background.* This research is of qualitative character. The use of qualitative research methods generally includes collecting data in form of words rather than numbers" (Punch, 2013). It enabled us to gain a deeper insight into the problem. In addition, if there is a specific research question, well-done qualitative research can answer it adequately (Busetto, Wick, & Gumbinger, 2020).

To realize the advantages of qualitative methods in practice, particularly flexibility, responsivity to context, openness, consecutive steps of data collection, and corresponding interpretation, the authors designed the research in interconnected and logically subsequent

steps. In complex, it allowed to find out the answer to the question of the urgent necessity of MIL upskilling training for university teachers in Ukraine.

Participants. A total of 32 university teachers took part in the research. They are employed at the following Ukrainian higher educational institutions: National University of Ukraine on Physical Education and Sport; Kyiv Borys Hrinchenko University, Kyiv National Linguistic University, Bogdan Khmelnytskyi Cherkasy National University. The educators are of different ages (from 26 to 67 years old) and have different work experience (from 3 to 30 years). They are working in different departments (tourism, the English language, translation and communication, pedagogy, and psychology) and with different categories of students – Bachelor's and Master's degrees. Besides, they are occupying different positions from assistants to lecturers or the heads of the departments, and they are PhDs, Assistant Professors, or Professors.

All the respondents gave their consent to take part in the research.

Procedure. The research was done in the following steps:

- document study that gave the opportunity to study the scientific literature devoted to the problem in question;

- planned and ad hoc observations in the result of which we took notes on communication between university educators and students, the interaction exclusively in the professional groups of university educators from different higher educational institutions. These field notes helped in systemizing the received data;

- semi-structured interviews with university educators for which a list of relevant questions was created on the basis of the previous research steps (literature study and observations). Interviews were conducted orally to promote the interactive component of the method (Busetto, Wick, & Gumbinger, 2020).

Like with observations, the authors took written notes and made some audio recordings;

- data analysis in the form of synthesis and abstraction after which the received results were grouped and summarized.

The interviews were conducted in Ukrainian. That is why the interviewees' answers were translated into English as exactly as possible.

Results and Discussion

1.1. The essence of media and information literacy in university educators' opinions.

After receiving the personal data of the respondents, they were asked how they understood the term "MIL". It turned out that there was no common interpretation. In addition, they interchanged different types of literacies: media, information, computer, and digital. It was reflected in different terminology the respondents were operating. The most frequently used terms were "media literacy", "information literacy", "digital and media literacy", "media competency", "media education", and "media training".

The most typical answers were grouped into the 3 categories of the term meaning:

(1) MIL as skills of using digital and media tools:

"Media literate people can easily use digital-based resources and devices".

"Media and information competency comprises the knowledge in how the digital media works and makes a person technologically smart".

"It is an ability to operate appropriate technology in the educational process in order to find, access, and use the necessary information for the required purpose".

(2) MIL as skills of critical thinking and practical consumption of information;

"This is the ability to find and evaluate the information, organize and present its main idea and then reflect on it. It also means the ability to produce media messages in a variety of forms".

"Media and information literacy helps a person think critically about what they hear, see or read in the media detecting a false message and fake news".

"It is figuring out the selection of the relevant and reliable information when an individual distinguishes truths and falsehoods".

(3) MIL as the ability to learn cyberspace and feel safe in it:

"Media and information literacy is the person's ability to resist all possible threats in cyberspace".

"*It comprises a set of skills that enables a person to feel free and safe on the Internet when he or she is in search of the necessary information*".

It is worth mentioning that the definitions above are rather narrow in comparison to the one presented in the Concept of Media Education in Ukraine (2016). It is said that the modern trend is to unite media and information literacy into one concept MIL– media and informational literacy and to understand it as a combination set of competences (knowledge, skills and attitudes) that give customers the opportunity: to use the media effectively and safely; choose consciously and understand the content and services, to make decisions and use the full range of possibilities that are offered by new communication technologies and media information systems, as well as to protect oneself and the family from harmful or vulnerable information material.

1.2. The level of media and information literacy among university educators.

When defining the MIL level, the respondents were asked to assess their skills according to the 5-grade scale "*sufficiently media literate – rather media literate – media literate – insufficiently media literate – media illiterate*". The majority of the interviewees consider themselves rather a media literate. Only a few assessed their level as "sufficiently media literate" and several persons thought their media literacy "not sufficient". Interestingly, those who consider themselves "sufficiently media literate" belong to the younger generation, whereas those "not sufficiently media literate" are 50+. Moreover, these several educators, as it appeared during the interviews, have taken special courses in developing MIL skills. Obviously, knowing what MIL really is, they realize that "being media literate" requires continuous lifelong learning and continuously mastering these skills. Hence, they defined their MIL level as "not sufficient" one. Those who think of themselves as "rather a media literate" were convinced that despite their available MIL skills, they feel it is not enough especially in the educational process. This feeling has aggravated because of the war in Ukraine and a great deal of fake news in the media.

1.3. What is being media literate?

We asked the interviewees to enlist skills that make a person media literate. The list appeared rather long and diverse. Generally, these skills corresponded to the meaning of

the terms "media literacy" and "media and information" or could be inferred from its definitions.

As a result of systemizing the given skills, a list that included 10 top qualities of a media-literate person was formed. It begins with the most frequently named skills.

Hence, "a media literate person", in respondents' opinion, is able to:

- access, analyze and evaluate the information that is received through media;

- think critically to verify the information and recognize other points of view;

- view the information objectively;

- determine if the information is credible or fake;

- make own, independent judgments and choices;

- create own media messages expressing own views creatively and effectively;

- use up-to-date technological tools;

- explain the information to others;

- use the information responsibly and in an ethical way;

- feel safe and confident in cyberspace.

1.4. *Benefits of being media literate*.

All the respondents, despite their different interpretations of MIL, emphasized the importance of its acquisition. Interestingly, they assessed its importance on two levels: personal and global.

Those who see the personal benefits of being media literate mentioned the following:

"*It is something the people need to live and work successfully today*".

"*If you have these skills, you are able to free your mind, make your own independent judgements and choices. Moreover, you are able to express yourself creatively*".

For globally thinking respondents, the most typical answers were:

"*It is a key 21st-century skill*".

"*It empowers all people of the planet to be involved in a global media environment*".

"*It's a vital skill today not only for a profession including a teacher's one but also for everybody*".

Logically, there should have been one more level between personal and global ones. However, there appeared no mention of the benefits of MIL for the community where the respondents are living. Though it is worldly acknowledged that the constituent element of media and information literacy is democratic citizenship (Flores-Koulish, 2019). The focus on MIL nowadays has "shifted from individual competencies to community involvement" (Madzarevic, 2018). In other words, every member of the community no matter who he or she is (male or female, employed or unemployed, school or university student, a child or an adult), can contribute to contemporary society (Meeus, Ouytsel, & Driesen, 2014, p. 69) in accordance with their needs and capacities by using various media and different content. As a result, MIL can be truly considered an important part of civic literacy that is shaping civic culture.

It is worth mentioning that substantiating the importance of MIL today, the interviewees also emphasized the benefits it can give to students. Among the most common were:

"Media literate teachers can help students become active consumers of information".

"Students will learn how to determine credible sources of information".

"They will learn how to be responsible creators of media".

Summing up, it is expedient to mention that pedagogues realize the benefits of being media literate and, being lifelong learners, they extrapolate the necessity of continuous learning to MIL development.

On critical analysis of the received results, the researchers designed a set of recommendations on how to change the media and information literacy training of university educators in Ukraine for the better.

Recommendations

The recommendations are formulated according to three levels: individual; institutional; national.

On the national level, it is necessary to:

- provide the adequate legislative provision of media and information literacy for all citizens of Ukraine;

- support implementing the Concept of Media Education (Kontseptsiia, 2016) in the educational system of Ukraine (formal, non-formal, and informal);

- pay more attention to MIL training of all population layers from children to adults;

- make MIL a part of comprehensive teachers' training at the universities.

On the institutional level, the following should be done:

- pedagogical universities and faculties should design special MIL upskilling training courses considering the national context and university educators' needs;

- post-diploma teachers' training institutes should recommend teachers who are in their upskilling programs to choose MIL courses;

- methodical provision (curricular components, textbooks, online resources) for MIL training of teachers should be created, available, easily found, and free;

- more attention should be paid to the use of non-formal and informal education potential for developing MIL;

- open forums, conferences, real-time and recorded seminars, and webinars should be available to share best practices in MIL training for university educators, the first and rather effective is Media Center activity of Borys Hrinchenko Kyiv University;

- university academic and managerial staff should encourage university educators to be motivated to master their MIL competencies.

On the individual level a university educators should:

- be involved in lifelong learning, including MIL training and upskilling;

- realize the importance of being media literate;

- share their experience and best practices of how to master MIL skills;

- be active in professional communication in cyberspace and face-to-face in the field of media literacy.

Obviously, it is not possible to outline all the recommendations on how to develop and upskill MIL competences of university educators. But even these few ones, if they are realized in the complex, can significantly improve the state of MIL among Ukrainian university educators.

Conclusion

Media and information literacy has gained a considerable significance worldwide, and particularly, in Ukraine. The efficient way to develop MIL skills of the citizens is through well-trained pedagogues as they help navigate in media information and cyberspace.

The qualitative research conducted among educators from Ukrainian universities showed a critical situation with MIL training. University educators have to cope with the challenge on their own as the emphasis in MIL development activities is put on school teachers. A good way out could become creation of MIL centers that offer MIL upskilling training for university scientific and pedagogical staff, the implementation of MIL development curriculum designed by MIL experts from Borys Hrinchenko Kyiv University as an example.

In the authors' opinion, the realization of the offered recommendations will improve MIL skills of university educators and change the situation with for the better.

Further perspectives include conducting a quantitative research, particularly experiment for testing the efficiency of implementing the offered recommendations at universities and the dynamics of MIL development among university scientific and pedagogical staff.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Підвищення кваліфікації викладачів університетів з медіа та інформаційної грамотності: український контекст

Бабушко Світлана, https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8348-5936, професор, доктор педагогічних наук, завідувач кафедри туризму Національного університету фізичного виховання і спорту України, вул. Фізкультури, 1, Київ, Україна, 03150, babushko64sr@gmail.com

Соловей Мирослав, https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8380-3674, доцент, кандидат педагогічних наук, проректор з навчально-виховної роботи Київського національного лінгвістичного університету, вул. Велика Васильківська, 73, Київ, Україна, 03150, mir.solovei@gmail.com

Соловей Людмила, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5876-3532, доцент, кандидат педагогічних наук, доцент кафедри англійської мови та комунікації Київського університету імені Бориса Грінченка, вул. Бульварно-Кудрявська, 18/2, Київ, Україна, 04053, l.solovei@kubg.edu.ua

Анотація. Нині медіа-інформаційна грамотність (МІГ) набула важливого значення в усьому світі й, зокрема, в Україні. Ефективним способом розвитку навичок МІГ громадян є добре підготовлені вчителі, оскільки вони допомагають орієнтуватися в інформаційному та кібер-просторі. На жаль, питанню підвищення кваліфікації з МІГ викладачів закладів вищої освіти приділяється недостатньо уваги. З огляду на це, автори поставили за мету дослідити особливості підвищення кваліфікації з розвитку МІГ навичок викладачів університетів в Україні.

Для з'ясування сучасного рівня МІГ викладачів ЗВО та їх потреби у спеціальному навчанні, зокрема підвищенні кваліфікації з МІГ було застосовано методологію якісного дослідження. Методологія включала кілька етапів: огляд літератури, підготовка запитань для інтерв'ю, спостереження та спілкування, взаємодія в професійних групах викладачів університету, проведення напів-структурованих інтерв'ю, аналіз отриманих даних і напрацювання низки рекомендацій.

Проаналізовано кілька термінів, які використовуються викладачами українських університетів для позначення концепту «медіа та інформаційна грамотність»: від «медіа освіта», «медіа компетентність», «медіа підготовка». Крім того, існують різні тлумачення терміну та різні характеристики медіаграмотної людини. В результаті проведення інтерв'ю з викладачами кількох українських університетів було з'ясовано, що рівень медіа та інформаційної грамотності більшості викладачів ЗВО, на їхню думку, є недостатнім, попри те, що вони усвідомлюють переваги МІГ як для особистого, так і для професійного

Svitlana Babushko, Myroslav Solovei, Liudmyla Solovei

розвитку. Як наслідок, більшість із них використовують ресурси МІГ в системах неформальної та інформальної освіти. Серйозним викликом для викладачів ЗВО стає відсутність відповідних медіа та інформаційних освітніх ресурсів українською мовою саме для викладачів закладів вищої освіти. Наявні методичні ресурси здебільшого розраховано на шкільних учителів. Результати дослідження дали підстави для висновку про нагальну потребу у проведенні спеціального МІГ навчання в межах курсів підвищення кваліфікації для викладачів українських ЗВО та про необхідність розробки відповідних методичних ресурсів, орієнтованих на потреби вищої освіти. Авторами було розроблено набір рекомендацій на трьох рівнях (національному, інституційному та індивідуальному) для подолання викликів та задоволення МІГ потреб викладачів.