



## ORIGINAL PAPER

# Media Literacy in Primary Education: Teachers' Perspectives and Practices

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### Abstract:

In modern society media literacy is increasingly important especially for primary school children. While informal education, such as parental influence, plays a role, formal education holds the main responsibility for systematically developing media competencies. Within this system, teachers not only deliver curriculum content but also actively shape students' media skills and assess their mastery.

This study explores how primary school teachers perceive students' media competencies and evaluate their own media literacy skills. It also examines their satisfaction with institutional support, additional training, and professional development, as well as the barriers they face in daily teaching. The research was conducted via an online survey distributed by email, with data analyzed descriptively.

Additionally, the paper reviews the theoretical background of media education, its development within primary education, and the importance of the cross-curricular topic "Use of Information and Communication Technology" in the national curriculum. Results show teachers' high awareness of media literacy's importance but also reveal challenges such as lack of resources, time, and professional development opportunities. The study concludes that successful media education requires ongoing support for teachers and the development of specific programs that enable students to critically engage with media content and participate actively in the media environment.

**Keywords:** *media literacy; primary education; teachers' perspectives; media competencies; curriculum implementation; professional development*

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### Introduction

Digital environment shapes how children and young people perceive the world and access information. The constant presence of media in students' lives calls for teaching approaches that go beyond technical skills and encourage critical thinking. The role of teachers is shifting from traditional knowledge transmitters to guides who help students understand, analyze, and use media content responsibly. Given these changes in education, it is crucial to define what we mean by media literacy and why it is more important than ever.

Media literacy requires systematic education. It should not remain a superficial concept but include continuous teaching and learning. In schools, this means not only using technology in class but also teaching about media, asking critical questions about how media represent the world and shape meaning. It is also important to consider how students use media outside school. Although education policies often promote digital literacy, it is usually narrowly understood as technical skills for using devices and programs. In contrast, media education is broader and focused on developing critical thinking rather than simply protecting children from harmful content (Buckingham, 2019: 235).

The aim of this paper is to examine the opinions of primary school teachers regarding the importance of media education and its application in the school system. Special attention is given to their satisfaction with students' media knowledge, difficulties in integrating media content into teaching, self-assessment of their own media skills, and the need for further training and support.

### Theory background

To properly explore these issues, it is important to outline the theoretical framework underpinning media pedagogy. According to Tolić (2009), media competencies are central to media pedagogy, with media literacy being a narrower concept within media education, which itself is part of the broader media upbringing. This distinction aids understanding media pedagogy's role in modern education. Voevoda (2021) defines media pedagogy as a branch focused on developing media literacy and preparing individuals, especially youth, for life in an information society by fostering critical thinking, understanding media influence, and developing communication skills adapted to technological changes.

Tolić (2009) highlights that media upbringing develops competencies across subjects, stressing critical thinking and action, recognizing media influence, distinguishing fiction from reality, understanding media functions, and acquiring communication skills vital for today's society. Key elements include interactive and self-critical media use and assessing their social role, contributing to social competence, cultural capital, and interdisciplinary knowledge. According to UNESCO's definition media education covers all forms of communication media, aiming to develop understanding of their operation and critical usage skills.

Moreover, the concept of literacy in the 21st century is closely linked to information literacy, the skills needed to navigate complex information environments. Media literacy focuses on mass media understanding and influence; information literacy covers all types of information regardless of transmission; digital literacy is a narrower skill set for handling digital information (Vrkić Dimić, 2014).

Forsman (2020) notes that since the 1960s, media literacy has been key to educating children for democratic participation, emphasizing responsibility, critical

thinking, creativity, expression, and thoughtful media use. This is achieved through compulsory education that integrates media as a subject (technology, history, theory) with pedagogical methods (production, analysis, critique). Thus, media literacy is the outcome of formal media education.

Taken together, these perspectives make clear that effective media education requires an ongoing, integrated approach within the formal school system, supported by well-prepared teachers and a curriculum that fosters critical engagement with media.

A historical overview of media literacy development helps understand its educational importance. Hobbs and Jensen (2009) trace media literacy back to 5<sup>th</sup> century BC rhetoric, which taught political skills through oratory and critical thinking. Early media literacy also linked to film as a learning tool for language and analysis. Critical questioning from ancient Greek education emphasized reflection and student experience, forming the basis of 20th-century media literacy. In the latter half of the 20th century, communication sciences shaped modern media literacy approaches, initially seen as protection against sensationalism and propaganda. During the 1970s, media literacy gained recognition for supporting civic participation and democratic rights, with teachers encouraging interactive methods on relevant topics. By the 1970s and 1980s, film and television became accepted educational media, and curricula integrated media literacy. New technologies allowed students to actively create media content, linking school and everyday life. By the late 20th century, media literacy faced challenges from digital culture and propaganda, evolving into a complex interplay of knowledge, identity, culture, and power vital to education and society.

Although media literacy has practical roots, modern authors emphasize the need for empirical studies on its effectiveness, especially in education.

Malović (2014) highlights growing interest in evaluating media competence development among children and adolescents, focusing on critical media analysis and behavior links. For example, exposure to media violence shows media literacy's role in youth education. Strict bans often increase forbidden content's appeal, especially among peers. Instead, clear explanations about undesirable content and behavior are necessary. School programs can reduce violent content consumption and acceptance of violence. Interventions should be age-appropriate and start early before peer influence and violent tendencies form. Media education includes curriculum integration, teacher training, educational activities, and use of resources.

Teachers' roles in modern education shift from information sources to guides supporting competence development. They become mentors inspiring and directing students with greater freedom and responsibility for learning outcomes. This requires new competencies, including linking theory and practice, recognizing individual needs, project management, and parent communication. Professional development is vital, including initial education, internships, and lifelong learning (Skupnjak, 2011).

Since 2019, Croatian schools introduced a curriculum for ICT use aimed at integrating digital technologies and developing students' digital skills. It is divided into two cycles: grades 1-2 focus on basic responsible ICT use and communication; grades 3-5 develop advanced digital skills including privacy protection and understanding technology's impact. ICT use encourages active, experiential learning, creativity, and independence. Teachers must continuously improve their digital competencies to integrate technology safely and effectively. Assessment includes formative and summative methods like digital portfolios and projects, promoting responsible and critical technology use (Odluka o donošenju kurikuluma za Međupredmetnu temu Uporaba informacijske i

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komunikacijske tehnologije za osnovne i srednje škole u Republici Hrvatskoj, 2019).

Draguzet (2022) studied integration of media and information literacy across compulsory subjects and interdisciplinary themes. Media literacy appears in most curricula, often linked to ICT use, but some subjects (like Physical Education) mention technology without clear media literacy outcomes. The interdisciplinary ICT theme includes many media literacy goals but requires teacher expertise and creative lesson planning. Teachers need training and support, as curricula allow flexible methods that can be challenging without guidance. Some subjects (Croatian language, Geography, Biology, Chemistry) emphasize media literacy clearly, while others (Music) lack concrete outcomes. Teacher development is essential to build students' skills in recognizing and critically analyzing information in a digital environment.

Research by Čižmar and Obrenović (2013) shows low media literacy knowledge among Croatian teachers and the public, highlighting the need for systematic media education. Schools rarely include media content, and teachers lack training. Students show weak critical media analysis skills. Ciboci and Osmančević (2015) found a gap between theoretical knowledge and practice among Croatian language teachers, with main barriers being lack of equipment, time, and expertise. They stress the need for teacher training and better materials. Public opinion research reveals differences: students want more digital skills, parents support early education, experts point to lacking resources and training. Ciboci's (2018) dissertation recommends interactive methods and stronger media literacy integration in curricula.

Ciboci, Gazdić-Alerić, and Kanižaj (2019) found school principals support media literacy but note challenges like lack of equipment, training, and unclear guidelines. They advocate educating parents and updating Croatian language content. A 2021 study in Velika Gorica showed strong teacher support for systematic media literacy education, mostly taught in homeroom and Croatian language classes, focusing on internet safety and fake news. Teachers use workshops and practical methods but call for improved curricula.

Ciboci Perša, Burić, and Bagić (2023) report that primary school teachers have good basic digital skills but struggle with advanced tasks like analyzing information. Most rarely create original media content except on social media. Older teachers show lower confidence in digital skills. Trixa and Kaspar (2024) studied pre-service teacher' perceived competence in teaching information literacy, finding they mostly use digital sources superficially and rarely verify information deeply. Differentiating fact from opinion, the key teaching skill, was present in few. Confidence in teaching relates to formal education and information awareness, while selective exposure lowers it. They recommend training in critical thinking, source evaluation, and cognitive bias awareness for better preparation.

This research highlights the importance of media literacy in education and the central role of teachers in its implementation. Despite growing awareness, challenges persist such as limited curricular support, uneven approaches, and insufficient teacher training. Mandarić (2012) notes that while digital media can boost motivation and independence, teachers must guide its responsible use. Their attitudes directly impact students' critical thinking, making it essential to understand how they perceive and apply media literacy in practice.

### **Methodology**

The aim of the paper is to gain insight into the current attitudes and opinions of primary school teachers regarding media education in primary schools in the city of Zadar, Republic of Croatia. The respondents are primary school teachers (teaching the first four grades of elementary school) employed in public elementary schools in the city of Zadar, Republic of Croatia. They were selected as the target group due to their daily involvement in the educational process and their relevant experience related to the research topic. For this research, a Google Forms questionnaire was created to explore teachers' attitudes toward media education of lower-grade elementary school students in the city of Zadar. The questionnaire includes a combination of open-ended and closed-ended questions covering key research areas: respondents' socio-demographic data, teachers' attitudes toward the importance of media education, self-assessment of their own competencies for implementing media education, obstacles and challenges in integrating media education into teaching, and the need for additional support or training. The questionnaire is anonymous and was distributed to teachers via email. Data collected from the closed-ended questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The responses to open-ended questions were analyzed qualitatively using thematic analysis.

### **Research results and discussion**

The survey was conducted in September 2024 in elementary schools in the city of Zadar in Croatia. Questionnaires were distributed to all elementary schools in Zadar, and a total of 45 completed responses were received. The most represented age group was 40–49 years, comprising 35.56% of respondents. This was followed by the 50–59 age group with 22.22%, and the 30–39 age group with 20.00%. The 20–29 and 60+ age groups were equally represented, each accounting for 11.11% of respondents.

When asked to explain their understanding of the term 'media education,' respondents provided open-ended answers. A thematic analysis of these responses was conducted to identify key elements that reflect their interpretations of the term. The coded content was grouped into themes based on shared or similar characteristics. A total of 40 responses were included in the analysis, as they were deemed suitable for qualitative interpretation. Six thematic categories were identified: Access to Information and Data Sources, Critical Analysis and Evaluation of Media Content, Digital and Information Competence, Internet Safety and Responsible Behavior, Cultural and Historical Aspects of Media, and Forms of Media Expression. The responses show that, overall, the participants recognized relevant characteristics of media literacy. Respondents perceive media education as a multidimensional concept - a combination of technical skills, critical thinking, and an understanding of various forms and functions of media. Table 1 shows that teachers most commonly associate media education with critical thinking about media and recognizing their role and influence (22.5%), as well as with various forms of media expression (22.5%). They also recognize the importance of digital skills (20%) and access to information from various sources (17.5%). Less emphasis is placed on the cultural and historical aspects of media (17.5%) and on digital safety and responsible internet use (12.5%).

**Table 1. Understanding of 'Media Literacy'**

Category	(%)	Summary of Response	Example Response
Access to Information and Data Sources	17.5%	Includes the ability to search for, find, and use information from various sources such as the internet, print media, TV, and radio.	"Media education is gathering information from various sources such as the internet, television, radio, newspapers..."
Critical Analysis and Evaluation of Media Content	22.5%	Involves critical thinking, identifying misinformation, analyzing media messages, and understanding the impact of media.	"Introducing students to both the positive and negative aspects of media."
Digital and Information Competence	20.0%	Refers to technical knowledge and skills in using digital tools, applications, and platforms for information and communication.	"The ability and skill to use media."
Internet Safety and Responsible Behavior	12.5%	Includes awareness of personal data protection, online safety, and rules of behavior in the digital space.	"Types of media, usage, internet safety, responsible and safe behavior."
Cultural and Historical Aspects of Media	17.5%	Relates to understanding the history of media, the cultural role of various forms such as film, comics, and advertisements, and their evolution over time.	"Learning about the history and development of media and its impact on society, as well as developing media-related skills."
Forms of Media Expression	22.5%	Involves recognizing different types and formats of media (e.g., comic books, film, advertisement), their expressive means and communicative functions such as informing, entertaining, and educating.	"Key terms: newspaper, magazine, comic book, film, advertisement, internet, social media,..."

The following question focused on teachers' perception of their own media competence. As shown in Table 2, teachers generally rated their media competence quite highly. On a scale from 1 to 5, most dimensions received a score above 4. None of the dimensions were rated with the lowest score. A rating of 2 (poor) was given by only 2.22% of respondents, and only in the dimension of Integrity and Communication. The highest average scores were recorded in the dimensions of Tolerance (4.36), Creativity (4.33), and Openness (4.31). This may suggest that teachers feel particularly confident in areas related to interpersonal relationships, acceptance of diversity, and the ability to express

themselves through media. On the other hand, the lowest average score (3.80) was recorded in the Integrity dimension, which may reflect some uncertainty regarding ethical behavior or familiarity with rules of conduct in the digital environment. Additionally, the dimensions of Management (4.0) and Communication (4.11) received slightly lower scores compared to the others, which could indicate that some teachers feel they could improve in managing digital tools and media communication. Overall, teachers see themselves as competent in these areas but are aware that there is room for further development.

**Table 2. Self-Assessment of Teachers' Media Competencies**

Dimension	1(%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	Average rating
Technical Dimension	0.0	0.0	20.00	53.33	26.67	4.06
Integrity	0.0	2.22	35.56	42.22	20.00	3.80
Tolerance	0.0	0.0	8.89	46.67	44.44	4.36
Creativity	0.0	0.0	11.11	44.44	44.44	4.33
Management	0.0	0.0	26.67	46.67	26.67	4.00
Communication	0.0	2.22	17.78	46.67	33.33	4.11
Openness	0.0	0.0	13.33	42.22	44.44	4.31

Description: 1 – Very Poor, 2 – Poor, 3 – Satisfactory, 4 – Good, 5 – Very Good

Adapted from Široki (2024) Stavovi učitelja o medijskom obrazovanju učenika razredne nastave u gradu Zadru, Diplomski rad, University of Zadar

When asked about barriers to integrating media education, respondents could select multiple options: lack of time, resources, school support, professional training, low student interest, or no barriers. The most frequently reported barrier was a lack of time (68.69%), indicating that teachers struggle to integrate media education into an already packed curriculum. Lack of resources and materials was noted by 51.11%, and insufficient professional training by 35.55%, highlighting the need for more teacher development. Lack of school support was reported by 13.33%, while no respondent reported low student interest. Two teachers reported no barriers.

Regarding support from the school's pedagogical service and administration, teachers rated it on a scale from 1 (very poor) to 5 (very good). Most teachers (35.55%) rated support as satisfactory (3), while 53% gave good or very good ratings (4 or 5), showing general satisfaction. However, 11.11% gave low ratings (1 or 2), indicating some dissatisfaction and a need for stronger institutional involvement. Overall, while support exists, improvements are needed for better integration of media education.

The results show that 66.67% of teachers had participated in media literacy training, while 33.33% had no such experience. This indicates that media literacy is given a certain level of importance in teachers' professional development. However, a significant portion of teachers have not participated in training in this area. This finding may point to the need for additional investment in professional support and training programs in order to equip all teachers with the skills necessary for effective implementation of media education in the classroom. Teachers who have undergone training are likely to feel more confident and competent in integrating media education,

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while those without training may face difficulties in applying appropriate methods and approaches.

Respondents who had attended training evaluated its usefulness in everyday teaching on a scale from 1 to 5. Most rated it positively, with 47.1% giving a 4 and 11.8% a 5, indicating general satisfaction. However, some lower ratings suggest that improvements are still needed to enhance its practical relevance.

Respondents were also asked an open-ended question about the types of support or additional training they consider necessary for better integration of media education into teaching. Out of all responses received, **33 were deemed suitable for analysis**. Through thematic analysis, four main categories were identified: **Training and Professional Development, Tools and Digital Infrastructure, Teaching materials, and Other**. The majority of suggestions (54.55%) related to training and professional development. Respondents emphasized the need for continuous learning through seminars, small-group training sessions, workshops, and educational platforms. They also highlighted the value of practical examples, experience sharing among colleagues, and self-directed learning. A significant portion of responses (21.21%) focused on digital infrastructure and tools. Teachers pointed to the need for technical support, stable internet access, digital devices, and overall better equipment in classrooms. In terms of teaching materials (15.15%), respondents stressed the importance of having access to modern, relevant, and regularly updated resources. They also noted the need for easier sharing and exchange of educational content. The “Other” category (9.09%) included responses that could not be clearly or quantitatively assigned to the above categories. These included comments such as the importance of not overusing media in teaching and the need for clear, practical guidance.

When asked to assess the level of media literacy among their students, teachers responded using a scale from 1 (very poor), 2 (poor), 3 (satisfactory), 4 (good), to 5 (very good). The results were analyzed across five aspects: critical thinking, safe internet use, understanding of media messages, digital literacy, and the ability to distinguish between true and false information.

**Table 3. Ratings for Different Aspects of Students' Media Literacy**

Aspects	1	2	3	4	5	Average rating
Critical thinking	2.22	20.0	62.22	13.33	2.22	2.93
Safe internet use	6.67	28.89	42.22	17.78	4.44	2.84
Understanding of media messages	4.44	20.0	57.78	15.56	2.22	2.91
Digital literacy	2.22	15.56	51.11	24.44	6.67	3.18
Distinguishing between true and false information	13.33	35.56	37.78	11.11	2.22	2.53

Description: 1 – Very Poor, 2 – Poor, 3 – Satisfactory, 4 – Good, 5 – Very Good

Adapted from Široki (2024) Stavovi učitelja o medijskom obrazovanju učenika razredne nastave u gradu Zadru, Diplomski rad, University of Zadar

Most respondents rated their students' critical thinking skills as satisfactory (62.22%), while 12 respondents (13.33%) gave a rating of very good. On the other hand,

22.22% of respondents assessed the level of critical thinking as poor or very poor. Regarding safe internet use, 42.22% of respondents rated their students with a grade of 3, while 17.78% gave a grade of 4. The highest grade (5) was given to 4.44% of students. More than a third of teachers (35.56%) rated their students' ability to use the internet safely as poor or very poor. When it comes to understanding media messages, more than half of the teachers (57.78%) rated their students with an average score (3), while 15.56% gave a score of 4. Only 2.22% of students were rated with the highest grade (5). On the other hand, 24.44% of respondents assessed the level of understanding as low (grades 1 or 2). In terms of digital literacy, more than half of the teachers (51.11%) gave their students an average score, while 24.44% awarded a grade of 4. The highest grade (5) was given to 6.67% of students. Conversely, 17.78% of respondents assessed their students' digital literacy as low (grades 1 or 2). Regarding the ability to distinguish true from false information, almost half of the respondents (48.89%) gave a poor or very poor rating. A little more than a third (37.78%) rated it as satisfactory. The ability to distinguish true from false information was rated with a 4 by 11.11% of respondents, and with a 5 by 2.22%.

Overall, the results show that most teachers believe their students possess a moderate level of media literacy across the assessed dimensions. However, the significant proportion of poor and very poor ratings, especially in the area of distinguishing true from false information, highlights the need for further training and support in developing these skills.

Most primary school teachers in Zadar rate media education practices as satisfactory, while clearly expressing a need for improvements. Twenty-four respondents (53.3%) consider the quality of teaching content satisfactory, 13 (28.9%) good, and five (11.1%) poor. The suitability of the content to students' needs is rated satisfactory by 20 respondents (44.4%), good by 13 (28.9%), and poor by seven (15.6%). Educational resource availability satisfies 24 teachers (53.3%), while 13 (28.9%) rate it as good, and four (8.9%) as very good. Conversely, four respondents (8.9%) consider the resources poor or very poor. Training and professional development are recognized as the weakest points, rated satisfactory by 18 teachers (40%) and poor by 13 (28.9%). Student engagement with media topics is mostly rated satisfactory by 25 respondents (55.6%) and very good by five (11.1%). Despite the generally satisfactory ratings, the results highlight the need for improvements in teaching content, educational resources, and especially teachers' professional development.

At the end of the survey, 18 respondents provided open-ended suggestions for improving media education in primary classrooms. Through thematic analysis of the responses, the suggestions were grouped into two main categories. The majority of responses (77.77%) fell under Education and Professional Development, encompassing teachers' proposals for training, workshops, lectures, and practical teaching examples. In relation to teaching materials and curriculum, respondents emphasized the introduction of subjects focused on media, society, and media education, along with the need for additional teaching resources and pedagogical support. The category of Digital Infrastructure and School Equipment comprised 22.23% of the suggestions, highlighting the need for improved technical equipment, computers, and digital tools in classrooms.

These findings suggest that teachers' proposals for improving media education are primarily oriented toward enhancing their own professional competencies. Additionally, they emphasized the need for media-oriented curriculum content and teaching resources, while technical infrastructure was recognized as important, though

less frequently mentioned compared to professional development needs.

### Conclusion

Media literacy encompasses the skills and knowledge required to analyze, think critically about, and effectively use media content. In the digital age, where access to information is virtually unlimited, developing these competencies has become essential for active, responsible, and informed participation in society. Teachers play a key role in this process, as their approach, knowledge, and teaching methods shape students' attitudes and skills, guiding them toward an active and critical engagement with media. Despite the growing emphasis on the importance of media literacy, research and professional literature point to a number of challenges in its implementation within the education system. Teachers face unclear curricular guidelines, a lack of resources and opportunities for professional development, as well as differences in how the concept of media literacy is understood and approached. This gap between theoretical expectations and practical conditions complicates the consistent and systematic integration of media education into teaching. It is particularly important to invest continuously in teacher training and to ensure institutional support that will enable teachers to design and deliver high-quality instruction aimed at developing students' media competencies.

This study aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the attitudes and experiences of primary school teachers in Croatia regarding media literacy. The research focused on four key areas: teacher satisfaction with students' knowledge and interest, barriers to implementing media education, self-assessment of teachers' own competencies, and the need for additional support and training. The results show that teachers mostly assess their students' level of media literacy as moderate. They express satisfaction with students' interest and level of critical thinking, but also concern about low competence in certain areas. The most prominent barriers identified were lack of time, resources, and professional training. Teachers rated their technical competence highly, while self-assessments in areas such as creativity and openness were lower, indicating potential for further professional development. In addition, although most respondents had participated in training, the findings suggest a need for higher-quality and more accessible educational materials, as well as greater engagement within the school system.

Teachers define media education as a complex process that involves technical, ethical, and cultural aspects, emphasizing the importance of safety, ethics, and the development of critical thinking. Although there have been positive developments and growing awareness of the importance of this topic, the research findings confirm that successful integration of media education requires systematic support and investment in the professional development of teachers. The development of students' media competencies largely depends on the training and motivation of their teachers.

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The authors contributed equally to this work.

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### Tables and Figures

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Table 3. Ratings for Different Aspects of Students' Media Literacy

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