

MEDIA LITERACY LEVELS OF TURKISH UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

With the help of the developments in information and communication technologies, the role of media has gained importance in modern life. While utilizing from media people's being aware of its negative effects together with the positive ones. Due to its positive and negative aspects, media literacy has started to be considered as an important concept for preventing individuals from detrimental effects of media tools. The purpose of this study is to determine the media literacy level of university students. The study group was consisted of Turkish university students. Data was collected with "Media Literacy Level Determination Scale" which was developed by Karaman and Karataş (2009). The students' replies were analyzed under three dimensions as "being knowledgeable", "analyzing and reacting" and "judging, being aware of implicit messages" of media tools. The data collected through the scale analyzed with SPSS. In order to determine the students' media literacy levels; frequency, percent, mean, and Standard deviation were used as descriptive statistics. To determine whether there were any differences between the replies t-test and ANOVA were used according to the type of the variable. As the result of the study, media literacy levels of Turkish university students were seen together with the how the variables like having a computer, having internet access facilities, reading newspaper regularly, frequency of watching TV., frequency of using internet affected their levels.

Keywords: media literacy, Turkey, university, student

INTRODUCTION

Technological developments have profoundly influenced the ways how people communicate and share the messages with each other. These developments have also caused essential changes in social life as well. Now people are expected have certain skills to adapt today's world. Therefore education and educators have undertaken a new role to equip the individuals with the required skills. The dimensions of education have been enlarged with these new roles and content of literacy as a concept have been enriched. Today educators and policymakers agree that individuals must develop these 21st century skills like critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and information literacy (Ahn, 2013).

Now literacy indicates a number of new skills and involves gaining the skills and knowledge to read, interpret and produce certain types of texts and contributing to culture and society. It is a commonly agreed fact that education and literacy are intimately connected. In an era of technological revolution, educators must make use of forms of literacy; such as media, multimedia and computer literacy in order to restructure education increase the contribution of education to social life (Kellner&Share, 2005).

Thus, it could be asserted that media literacy might be considered as one of the important skills each individual should have. Because of that reason educators and researchers have started to address this educational need. Programs of media literacy education have been developed and many different definitions of media literacy have been proposed. Despite the various definitions, one of the widely accepted definitions which was agreed upon at the National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy and adopted by the National Association for Media Literacy Education suggests that media literacy involves a set of competencies associated with accessing, analyzing, evaluating, and communicating messages (Schmidt, 2013).

Educational experts consider media literacy as a way of using mass media actively in order to be conscious media consumers. The experts emphasize the importance of providing children with the insight to use media. However, media literacy includes not only teaching positive and negative sides of media or how to use it, but it also encompasses understanding, expressing and interpreting facts and events daily life; so, media literacy should cover critical, creative, and cultural functions of media which is an indispensable reality of life and cornerstone of social change (Elma et al, 2010).

In Turkey, media literacy education program aims to protect children and youth against the possible harmful effects of the media. Media literacy education has been started in 2006 as a pilot study by Turkish Radio Television Authority and the Turkish Ministry of Education cooperatively. As a result of the interest of the students to the course, Media Literacy course has been started to be given countrywide during 2007-2008 academic year as an elective course for the 6th, 7th and 8th classes of lower secondary schools. 11.45% of total lower secondary school students (424.655 students) took this elective course in the first year. This rate has increased to 14.04% (553.791 students) of total students during 2011-2012 academic year (Alagözlü, 2012; Bek 2011; Altun, 2009).

In media literacy education, the basic principle for teachers is to decide the points incompatible with society's moral values, prevent students from being exposed to negative effects of media. Therefore, teachers as the models for students should be equipped with media literacy skills to reduce the harmful effects of it. In this study it was aimed to determine Turkish university students' media literacy levels together with the aspects which has impact on it.

METHODOLOGY

Study Sample

Study group consisted of 140 students from Sakarya University Faculty of Education Special Education, Psychological Counseling and Guidance and Computer and Instructional Technologies departments. The students participating to the study were all teacher candidates attending to the mentioned departments of education faculty in 2012-2013 academic year. 32.9% of the participants were from Computer and Instructional Technologies Department, 15.7% were from Psychological Counseling and Guidance Department and 51.4% were from Special Education Department. 46.4% of the participants were female, 53.6% were male students. Most of the students (75%) responded that they had their own personal computer while 25% responded that they did not have their own computer. What is more, 64.3% of the students stated that they had internet access but 35.7% said they did not have internet access. 34.3% of the students replied that they read the newspaper regularly, 65.7% replied they did not. As for the time spent on watching TV., 43.6% responded that they watched TV. less than 1 hour a week; 33.6% responded that they watched TV. between 1-5 hours a week; 17.9% responded that they watched TV. between 6-10 hours a week; 2.1% responded that they watched TV. between 11-20 hours a week; and 1.4 responded that they watched TV. more than 20 hours a week. Moreover, 11.4% of the students stated that they used internet less than 1 hour a week; 26.4% of the students stated that they used internet between 1-5 hours a week; 26.4% stated that they used internet between 6-10 hours a week; 13.6% stated that they used internet between 10-20 hours a week; and 22.1% stated that they used internet more than 20 hours a week.

Instruments

Necessary data was collected through “Media Literacy Level Determination Scale” developed by Karaman&Karataş (2009). The scale had 17 statements with five-point-Likert-scale responses. The scale had three subscales as being informed about mass media, being able to analyze and response, judging and being aware of implicit messages. Media literacy Level Determination Scale explained 42.5% of the total variance of students’ media literacy levels. Factor loadings ranges varied between .745 and .415. The construct validity of the scale could be regarded as high.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed with SPSS (Version 20). Percentages and frequencies were used to analyze demographic variables. To describe students’ media literacy levels descriptive statistics were used. To make comparisons between the students media literacy levels based on the variables like having personal computer, having internet access, reading newspaper regularly, time spent for watching TV., time spent for using internet t-test and One Way Anova were used.

FINDINGS

Descriptive statistics related with the responses given by the students in the study group to the statements included in the scale were given in the Table 1.

Table 1: *The Responses of the students to the statements in the Media Literacy Level Determination Scale*

Statements	X	SD
I am able to decide the accuracy of the messages appeared in the media on my own.	4.12	.932
I am able to realize the aspects like consumption culture, violence etc. produced by the media.	4.12	.860
I am able to realize for what purpose (social responsibility, tempting for consumption, giving information, entertainment) the messages are created	4.15	.858
I am able to identify the positive and negative aspects of the broadcasts produced by the media.	4.17	.807
I consider the messages given by the media from an analytical point of view.	4.04	.812
I am informed about the ways how the media influence individuals.	3.97	.885
I realize the media has its own political, economic, cultural and social priorities.	4.17	.776
I give positive or negative reactions to the messages given by the media.	3.78	1.078
I propose to avoid from negative aspects of the broadcasts produced by the media.	3.27	1.143
I am aware that the messages given in the media might be reflected in different ways in different media organs.	3.71	.976
I watch over if the media follow the ethical codes in the broadcasts.	3.34	1.057
I know how much I can influence individually the broadcasting process in the media.	3.12	1.055
I realize if biased news is reported in the media.	3.92	.873
I realize the implicit advertisements in the media.	3.69	.920
I observe the influence of sponsors on broadcasts.	3.67	.923
I realize the implicit messages transmitted by the media.	3.73	.910
I am able to analyze the meaning of the messages transmitted by the media.	3.85	.912

As seen in the table, the statements that the students agreed more were “identifying the positive and negative aspects of the broadcasts produced by the media” (X= 4.17) and “realizing the media has its own political, economic, cultural and social priorities” (X= 4.17). However, the statement that the participating students less agreed were “I know how much I can influence individually the

broadcasting process in the media” ($X = 3.12$). Overall media literacy level of the students was found out to be higher than the average level ($X = 3.81$).

Moreover, in order to compare the students’ media literacy levels based on the variables like having personal computer, having internet access, reading newspaper regularly t-test was used. As a result of the analysis, it was seen that the students who have their own personal computers ($X = 3.85$) and who read newspapers regularly ($X = 3.93$) had higher media literacy levels than the ones who do not have personal computers ($X = 3.69$) and who do not read newspaper regularly (3.75). Media literacy levels of the students who have internet ($X = 3.818$) and who do not have ($X = 3.815$) were almost the same. But the differences between these groups were not statistically meaningful. Therefore it might be said that having personal computer [$t_{(138)} = 0.112$; $p > 0.05$], reading newspaper regularly [$t_{(138)} = 0.059$; $p > 0.05$] and having internet access [$t_{(138)} = 0.974$; $p > 0.05$] did not have a statistically significant impact on the students’ media literacy levels.

Furthermore, One Way Anova was used to compare the students’ media literacy levels based on the variables like time spent for watching TV. and time spent for using internet. According to the results, was found out that the media literacy levels of the students did not differ depending on the frequency of watching TV. ($[F_{(2-137)} = 1.871$; $p > 0.158$], but the frequency of using the internet [$F_{(2-137)} = 5.446$; $p < 0.05$] influenced the students’ media literacy levels. Thus it, might be said that the students who use internet between 6-10 hours (about one or one and a half hour a day) a week have higher media literacy levels than the ones using the internet more than 10 hours a week (more than one and a half hour a day) and between 1-5 hours a week (less than one hour a day).

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study could be summarized as Turkish university students’ media literacy levels were higher than the expected level and having personal computer, reading newspaper regularly and having internet access influenced students’ media literacy levels slightly and in a positive way but the influence was not statistically meaningful. What is more, it was concluded that the duration that the students spent in front of TV. or on the internet also affected their levels of media literacy. The time spent for surfing on the internet had a more considerable effect in terms of media literacy. However, it does not mean that spending too much time on TV. or internet had positive effect on media literacy, as the students who watch TV or use the internet about 1-1.5 a day had higher media literacy levels than the ones who spent more or less than this amount.

Considering the findings it could be restated that the students who use media more effectively that is, who use media tools at the desired level (not much or less than needed) had higher media literacy skills. Therefore instead of spending much or less time on TV or internet, using these tools aware of their individual requirements would contribute to improve such skills.

As a model for their students, it is crucial for the teachers to have higher literacy skills and make use of media consciously. With the recent facilities provided by the state, Education faculty students have the chance to improve the professional skills. Information literacy and media literacy are of these two key skills. So, it is important for us to define their strong and weak points in terms of literacy and train them as the teachers of the future considering the aspects what they lack. To make teachers aware of the positive and negative aspects of media and make use of such information in teaching, it is essential for teachers to increase their literacy skills. In-service-training courses could be designed to train existing teachers, who are already in charge. Offering media literacy courses at universities is another option to make sure that prospect teachers have adequate media literacy skills. In this way it is possible to guarantee that all individuals who are trained to be teachers have required qualification. It is an important issue to determine university students' media literacy levels and the factors affecting their levels.

The study gave us some hints showing Turkish University students' media literacy levels and some of the aspects affecting the media literacy. Besides, it might be suggested that the scale used in the study could be redesigned, improved and implemented to some other group who have different educational backgrounds and different professional requirements.

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