

Media education in Spain: Awareness, implementation, and challenges. The case of Catalonia

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Abstract

This study analyses the current state of media education in Catalonia, its strengths and weaknesses, and the challenges it faces. In-depth interviews with five specialists and six teachers and educators were carried out. This qualitative approach offers key first-hand insight into the definition of the term 'media education'; the relationship between media education and ethical journalism; core elements any media education programme should include, along with content, tools and guidelines for teachers; the level of expertise and training of teachers and specialists; the importance of student access to media education initiatives; and the challenges of media literacy. Results show that media literacy includes the ability to read and understand media languages and to create audiovisual messages independently and maturely, and to take certain ethical principles into consideration; and that the media companies should take their responsibilities seriously, since it is they that create images and role models that have a great impact on children and teenagers – while children and teenagers, on the other hand, demonstrate a very positive response to media literacy initiatives. The specialists and educators interviewed have different levels of training and have been involved in a variety of projects. They note that key challenges for media literacy include lack of interest from the authorities, lack of training among teachers, and the need for incentivisation and easy-access resources for educators.

Keywords: media literacy; Catalonia; Spain; awareness; implementation; challenges

Resum. *Educació en mitjans a Espanya: conscienciació, implementació i reptes. El cas de Catalunya*

Aquesta recerca té per objectiu aprofundir en la situació de l'educació mediàtica a Catalunya en relació amb la seva implementació als centres escolars de primària i secundària, les seves fortaleses i febleses i els reptes als quals s'enfronta. Per fer-ho, es duen a terme entrevistes en profunditat a cinc experts i sis educadors. Aquest enfocament qualitatiu ofereix informació rellevant i de primera mà sobre la definició del terme, la relació entre educació en mitjans i l'ètica periodística, aspectes centrals que qualsevol programa d'educació en mitjans ha d'incloure; així com continguts, eines i pautes per a la docència, el nivell d'experiència i formació entre professors i experts, la importància de l'accés dels estudiants a aquestes iniciatives i els desafiaments als quals s'enfronta l'alfabetització mediàtica. Els resultats mostren que aquesta inclou la capacitat de llegir i comprendre els diferents llenguatges dels mitjans, a més de crear missatges audiovisuals de manera madura i autònoma tenint en compte certs principis ètics; i que els mitjans de comunicació han d'assumir la seva responsabilitat en ser creadors d'imatges i rols que tenen un gran impacte en infants i adolescents, els quals, d'altra banda, tenen una resposta molt positiva a les iniciatives d'alfabetització mediàtica. Els experts i docents entrevistats presenten diferents nivells de formació i han participat en diversos projectes. Assenyalen que els grans desafiaments de l'educació mediàtica són la falta d'interès de les autoritats i de capacitació entre els docents, a més de la necessitat de motivació i de l'accés a recursos per part dels educadors.

Paraules clau: alfabetització mediàtica; Catalunya; Espanya; conscienciació; implementació; reptes

Resumen. *Educación en medios en España: concienciación, implementación y retos. El caso de Cataluña*

Esta investigación tiene por objetivo profundizar en la situación de la educación mediática en Cataluña con relación a su implementación en los centros escolares de primaria y secundaria, sus fortalezas y debilidades y los retos a los que se enfrenta. Para ello, se llevan a cabo entrevistas en profundidad a cinco expertos y seis educadores. Este enfoque cualitativo ofrece información relevante y de primera mano sobre la definición del término, la relación entre educación en medios y la ética periodística, aspectos centrales que cualquier programa de educación en medios debe incluir; así como contenidos, herramientas y pautas para la docencia, el nivel de experiencia y formación entre profesores y expertos, la importancia del acceso de los estudiantes a estas iniciativas y los desafíos a los que se enfrenta la alfabetización mediática. Los resultados muestran que esta incluye la capacidad de leer y comprender los distintos lenguajes de los medios, además de crear mensajes audiovisuales de forma madura y autónoma teniendo en cuenta ciertos principios éticos; y que los medios de comunicación deben asumir su responsabilidad al ser creadores de imágenes y roles que tienen un gran impacto en niños y adolescentes, quienes, por otro lado, tienen una respuesta muy positiva a las iniciativas de alfabetización mediática. Los expertos y docentes entrevistados presentan diferentes niveles de formación y han participado en distintos proyectos. Señalan que los grandes desafíos de la educación mediática son la falta de interés de las autoridades y de capacitación entre los docentes, además de la necesidad de motivación y del acceso a recursos por parte de los educadores.

Palabras clave: alfabetización mediática; Cataluña; España; concienciación; implementación; retos

1. Introduction

Despite the vast amount of literature available on the subject, the concept of media literacy is still evolving. Commonly used terms vary, from ‘media education’ to ‘education in audiovisual communication’, ‘Media and Information Literacy’ (MIL) – coined by UNESCO (1982) – or simply ‘media literacy’. The characteristics and implications of each of these terms are not always well explained and “the lack of a precise and agreed definition” explains the absence of specific action plans (Aguaded-Gómez and Pérez-Rodríguez, 2012: 23).

According to Buckingham (2005), ‘media education’ is the process of teaching and learning about media while the concept ‘media literacy’ refers to the result, that is the knowledge and abilities acquired. The discipline represents a new field of knowledge that brings together audiovisual communication and education and serves as a tool that challenges both knowledge and power inequalities between those who create content and those who passively consume it (Masterman, 1993).

Audiovisual communication capability is the ability to interpret and critically analyse images and messages and to correctly express oneself within the communicative field (Ferrés, 2007). Media education is a key step in the path towards a real participatory democracy, and an irreplaceable tool to empower citizens (Hart, 1998a; Dias-Fonseca and Potter, 2016), particularly those who are more vulnerable (Camilli-Trujillo and Römer-Pieretti, 2017). Therefore, it is an essential right (Masterman, 1993) which public authorities and supranational organisations should protect and promote (European Commission, 2018). Experts currently talk about critical media literacy education (Adjin-Tettey, 2022; Al Zou’bi, 2022; Butler, 2020) and emphasise its role in the fight against disinformation.

The existing literature highlights the risk of reducing media education to the development of digital capability (Buckingham, 2005; Kendall and McDougall, 2012), and of limiting digital capability to its most technological and instrumental expression while ignoring attitudes and values (Gutiérrez-Martín and Austin, 2012). According to Ferrés et al. (2011), the educational system does not lend itself to critical thinking that stimulates creativity, while motivation is one of the pillars of media education no matter the age, degree of access to technology or knowledge.

Previous research has advocated for the inclusion of this discipline on school and university curricula as a cross-cutting and compulsory subject, and has highlighted the importance of including training for teachers (Butler, 2020; López-Romero and Aguaded-Gómez, 2012; Tiede and Grafe, 2016).

Several studies have found a basic level of media literacy skills among Spanish teachers, while technological aspects represented their greatest weakness (Ramírez-García and González-Fernández, 2016; Romero-Rodríguez et al., 2019). However, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated technological changes at an unprecedented pace (Pérez-Tornero, 2020), forcing teachers to adapt rapidly to online teaching. Meanwhile, the younger generation – also

known as digital natives – show a higher level of development in the technology and language aspects of media literacy (Pérez-Rodríguez et al. 2019) but are not as competent on either critical or ethical aspects (Aguaded-Gómez and Pérez-Rodríguez, 2012; Ferrés et al., 2011; Romero-Rodríguez et al., 2019), a fact that also became evident during the pandemic (Tejedor et al., 2021). The EduMediaTest showed that the technology aspect is the one most mastered by young Catalans, followed by the aesthetic and ideological aspects, in common with the rest of Europe (Ferrés et al., 2022).

The situation is particularly problematic within a communication ecosystem characterised by the threat of disinformation (Aguaded-Gómez and Romero-Rodríguez, 2015), in which students have difficulty distinguishing between real and fake content (Herrero-Curiel and La-Rosa, 2022), amid rising concerns about the dangers posed by Artificial Intelligence (Kertysova, 2018; Bontridder and Poulet, 2021).

2. Media literacy in the Catalan context: pioneering initiatives and research

Catalonia started paving the way for media education in Spain in the 1970s after several projects at national and regional level failed to take off (Aparici and García-Matilla, 2016). Initiatives such as Drac Màgic,¹ AulaMèdia,² Teleduca,³ Cinescola⁴ and Cinema en curs⁵ marked the beginning of a new approach to media literacy in the region by offering free materials and training courses for teachers as well as initiatives for kids and adults.

In recent decades, dozens of education centres have carried out remarkable initiatives in Catalonia. Good examples include Radio Estalella⁶ (Vilafranca del Penedès), Radio Palafrugell⁷ (Girona), and Escola Solc (Barcelona), as well as short-term or seasonal projects such as the summer radio workshop *Casal Xic* in El Vendrell (Tarragona) and educational radio programmes such as *L'escola a la radio* run by the local station Ràdiocaldes in Caldes de Montbui (Barcelona).

Furthermore, the local TV stations Badalona TV and Canal SET, radio station Radio Falset and the newspaper Cugat Mèdia have given schoolchildren the opportunity to take part in several initiatives (González-Deumal, 2020; Recoder, 2019). In 2009, the Col·legi de Periodistes de Catalunya, together with the European Commission, launched the initiative *Prensa a les Escoles*⁸ for secondary and pre-university students. In 2020, a total of 172 media education initiatives at primary and secondary school level were identified in Catalonia (González-Deumal, 2020).

1. <<https://www.dracmagic.cat>>.
2. <<http://www.aulamedia.org>>.
3. <<http://www.teleduca.org>>.
4. <<http://cinescola.info>>.
5. <<https://www.cinemaencurs.org>>.
6. <<https://agora.xtec.cat/ceipestalella/categoria/radio-estalella/>>.
7. <<https://radiopalafrugell.cat/>>.
8. <<https://educaciomediatica.cat/tallers/>>.

The *Trams Foundation*⁹ works with several schools, with the aim of providing students with a critical and participative learning, while Think 1.tv¹⁰ is an initiative launched by Col·legi Montserrat (Barcelona) that seeks to share knowledge and the latest trends on innovative education. In the academic context, Edumèdia was a working group at the Autonomous University of Barcelona that focused on media education initiatives for primary and secondary schools.

The education network of the Catalan government promotes the use of radio broadcasting in schools through *XTEC Ràdio*,¹¹ while the Catalan Audiovisual Council (CAC)¹² continues working towards integrating media literacy into the curriculum through initiatives such as the CAC School Awards¹³ and EduCAC,¹⁴ an educational programme aimed at teachers, students and families that promotes media education in formal and informal learning contexts. At a national level, the initiative Telekids¹⁵ offers workshops and online courses for students and teachers.

In a bid to provide the necessary tools specifically to combat disinformation, several organisations in Catalonia – among them CAC and the Col·legi de Periodistes de Catalunya – have recently launched initiatives aimed at students of different levels (Carrillo-Pérez and Montagut-Calvo, 2019). These efforts joined those of Catalan fact-checking platforms Verificat and Fets o Fakes and education projects for all ages such as Learn to Check.¹⁶

Media education initiatives are mainly present at preschool and primary levels in Catalan public schools, which usually have ties with local media and use media production as “a stimulus or tool to test students’ spoken and written language skills” or even social skills such as teamwork or active listening (González-Deumal, 2020).

The concern for media education in Catalonia is a response to the gap created by the current media ecosystem, which is characterised by an overload of information allied with audiovisual illiteracy (Ambrós, 2006).

In recent decades, several studies have highlighted the difficulty of implementing media education in primary and secondary schools due to inflexibility in timetables and curricula, difficulties in coordinating teachers, and fragmentation of objectives in various areas such as language, technology, plastic arts and visual education (AulaMèdia, 2003). The need to promote critical thinking among students and media literacy training among teachers, and the important role of the “educumunicator” – a trainer for teachers at education centres– as well as the necessary interconnection between teachers, journalists and families are also some of the conclusions pointed out by experts

9. <<https://www.fundaciotrams.org>>.

10. <<https://www.think1.tv>>.

11. <<http://xtec.gencat.cat/ca/recursos/media>>.

12. <<https://www.cac.cat/en>>.

13. <<https://www.educac.cat/premis-educac>>.

14. <<https://www.educac.cat>>.

15. <<https://tallertelekids.com>>.

16. <<https://learntocheck.org/>>.

(CAC, 2003). In December 2005, a seminar held in Galicia within the framework of the 1st International Meeting on Audiovisual Education brought together journalists, teachers and several Communication and Education departments of Catalan universities, who agreed on the creation of the ‘discipline’ of Education in Communication. As a result, a group of experts signed the Manifesto for Audiovisual and Multimedia Education (García-Matilla et al., 2006) to raise awareness of the need to include audiovisual communication in the curricula.

More than 20 years later, these objectives remain. Launched in 2019, CAC’s Media Literacy Platform¹⁷ brings together 44 organisations and 20 experts with the aim of channelling participation in the field and providing recommendations to both public and private entities.

3. Method

The main objective of this study is to provide a deep understanding of how media literacy is implemented, taught and perceived in Catalonia, the region that has led the way in media education in Spain.

Following previous research on the topic, including studies that have developed instruments to measure media capability in different ages and social groups in Spain (Aguaded-Gómez et al. 2015; Del-Moral and Villalustre, 2013; Ferrés et al., 2022; Romero-Rodríguez et al. 2019), this study aims to show the current state of media education in Catalonia in terms of its implementation, strengths and weaknesses, and challenges. Five research questions guided this study:

RQ1. What does media literacy mean?

RQ2. Which core aspects should any media literacy programme include?

RQ3. What is the level of awareness of its importance among students, teachers, parents, the media and academics?

RQ4. Do educators have enough experience and formal training?

RQ5. What are the main problems and challenges that media literacy faces in Catalonia?

RQ6. How do students respond to media literacy programmes?

To answer these questions, a total of 11 semi-structured, in-depth interviews ranging from 40 to 90 minutes long were conducted in person with five media literacy experts and researchers and six educators in Barcelona between June and July 2019. The respondents were contacted again in May 2024 and were offered the opportunity to update their answers. The interviews were audio-recorded for subsequent transcription and detailed analysis.

Despite being first-hand descriptions, in-depth interviews provide a closer understanding of a part of the object of study that cannot be approached through content analysis. The use of open-ended questions serves to “explore topics in depth, to understand processes, and to identify potential causes of

17. <<https://www.plataformaeducaciomediatca.cat/index.html>>.

observed correlations” while the main goal of qualitative research “is not necessarily to collect all or most ideas and themes but to collect the most important ideas and themes” (Weller et al., 2018: 2).

The five experts interviewed are prominent academics with broad knowledge and practical experience of the topic:

- Salvador Alsíus, journalist, professor and former vice president of CAC
- Alba Ambrós, former high school teacher and lecturer at the University of Barcelona
- Joan Ferrés, lecturer at Pompeu Fabra University
- Miguel Ángel Prats, lecturer at Blanquerna-Ramon Llull University
- Raimon Ramis, project director at MediaBus

The educators were selected from a list of Catalan schools and high schools – provided by CAC – that organise media literacy projects for their students. All were working or have worked with secondary students, five in Barcelona and one in Tarragona:

- Magda Blanes, former schoolteacher
- Marc Magrinyà, Quatre Cantons school (Barcelona)
- Francesc Masdeu, Escola Virolai school (Barcelona)
- Marta Massana, Celestí Bellera high school (Granollers, Barcelona)
- Jaume Rafecas, Estalella i Graells school (Vilafranca del Penedès, Barcelona)
- Eloísa Valero, Martí i Franquès school (Tarragona)

The conversation scripts contained a total of six to twelve open-ended questions for the experts and ten to twenty open-ended questions for the educators. The questions revolved around the following topics arising from the research questions.

Table 1. Topics covered during the research interviews

Experts
Definition of the concept of media literacy/media education
Relationship between media education and ethical journalism
Core aspects any media education programme should include
Expertise, training, participation in media education projects
Situation of media education and its future: level of awareness, problems, and challenges
Educators
Definition of the concept of media literacy/media education
Importance of student access to media literacy programmes
Content, tools and guidelines to teach media education
Expertise, training and participation in media education projects
Situation of media education and its future: level of awareness, problems and challenges
Students' response to media education initiatives

Source: Interviews with experts and media literacy educators.

4. Results

4.1. *The concept of media literacy*

In his interview, Joan Ferrés preferred the term ‘media education’ instead of ‘media literacy’ since the former is “much more globalizing” and “refers to the person as a whole”; so too did Raimón Ramis, who referred to its connotations of “social commitment”. Ferrés defined media capability as “the ability to interact with all kinds of technologies in a mature, autonomous and complete way”. He recalled that in the “age of the prosumer” (Jenkins et al., 2019), the individual must be capable of “producing their own messages and of interacting with other people’s messages and disseminating them [...] with maturity, criteria, social commitment, autonomy, sensitivity.”

The other experts gave similar definitions. Alba Ambrós defined media literacy as the ability to understand and produce media messages “respecting some ethical principles”, while Miguel Ángel Prats emphasised the “production” side of the concept and highlighted the importance of distinguishing digital capability from media capability.

In Ramis’ opinion, media literacy is the result of learning how to understand and use these different media languages: “When we talk about media literacy, we often refer to reading rather than writing. [...] This education has a broader sense because it includes reading comprehension.”

For Salvador Alsíus, media communication is a “permanent need” and should be broader and more inclusive. He highlighted its practical side and the importance of thinking of it as “citizenship education.”

The teachers interviewed provided less technical definitions, but they agreed with the experts that the concept of media literacy is related to reading images and interpreting them, but also to the production of content (Francesc Masdeu and Marc Magrinyà). Magda Blanes defined it as the ability to rationalise visual impacts instead of letting emotions “drive” one. Jaume Rafecas and Marta Massana said that they hadn’t thought about an appropriate definition before, but the latter emphasised the importance of teaching the benefits and threats that technology poses for children and teenagers.

The definition of media literacy would have three parts, according to Eloísa Valero: the ability to analyse an image (“to decipher them”); to create them (teaching the students “the syntax of the image”); and to reflect on the image’s function (“either expressive or communicative, informative or commercial”).

4.2. *Media education and ethical journalism*

The media has a responsibility to educate audiences, according to the experts interviewed.

“Every communicator is an educator, whether they want it or not, for better or for worse,” said Ferrés. “Commercial TV educates more than educational TV, but there is no awareness of it,” he added.

Ramis insisted that the media creates “role models” while it is entertaining viewers, and Ambrós referred to an “invisible pact” between government authorities and traditional media, since neither of them is “interested” in boosting media education. Prats talked about the decline of media ethics and emphasised the media’s enormous responsibility amid the current problem of disinformation.

In Alsíus’ opinion, media education is – along with the fight against disinformation and media accountability – the third pillar of the media’s responsibility, since it is “a right of the public”.

4.3. Student access to media education programmes

The teachers interviewed agreed on the importance of student access to media literacy programmes so they can “wake up” to reality and learn the ability to prevent the potentially “damaging” side of images, but also so they can understand and feel part of society.

“In a democratic country, it is crucial to develop critical thinking regarding the news,” Magda Blanes said.

Magrinyá recalled that media literacy is one of the skills on the school curriculum, and that in the 21st century, “if students are not able to develop a critical sense, they are out of society”. Massana and Masdeu highlighted the role of media education to help students prevent “dangerous” aspects of images – such as manipulation and stereotypes – and provide them with both the creativity and ability to tell their “own stories.”

The students might be innocent, but “the image isn’t,” Valero said. Like Masdeu, she believes that the students need tools that allow them to “express themselves.”

Rafecas emphasised that children should learn not only about radio and television but also “the effort and hard work” behind them.

4.4. Core aspects of media education programmes

The five experts list different aspects that should be included in any media education programme. Among them are the analysis of images and media language knowledge – specifically, information, fiction, advertising and even videogames –, and practical resources for teachers.

Ferrés proposes an integrative methodology that combines analysis and interaction with messages, giving importance to the human subconscious and the way it approaches the messages.

According to Ambrós, media education is now more present in classrooms than it was a few decades ago, although she criticised the fact that this is mainly in terms of access to technology and content production, while there is a lack of analysis and language knowledge. In her view, people confuse media education with “making a video”. She also denounced the fact that audiovisual capability is not part of the cross-cutting skills within the school curriculum.

Ramis illustrated the issue with an example: “Just as we learn to write – we learn the grammar and the vocabulary –, we have to learn to write with images, its grammar and vocabulary.”

Prats believes that offering a toolbox and sharing good practices would help teachers to introduce media education in the classroom.

Alsíus used the example of EduCAC to note that any media education project should include information, fiction and advertising messages “in a broad sense”, referring to “everything the student has access to nowadays.” Attention should be paid to videogames, too, “because, for children, the borders [between different types of content] are quite blurred.”

4.5. Content, tools and guidelines to teach media education

All the teachers interviewed have introduced different media education initiatives in the classroom. Blanes organised the project “News of the Week”, in which students, with the help of their parents, select a piece of news, and practice “oral expression and critical thinking” to share it with their classmates. She has also introduced cinema to teenagers, who did “fake trailers of non-existent films that helped them to understand audiovisual language.”

For Magrinyà, an ideal media literacy course should include “a bit of everything” (journalistic language in press, radio and TV) and the role of the teacher might be that of a “facilitator” – someone who assists the students during the process.

Masdeu’s students usually work on several projects during the school year. Two of the initiatives he mentioned were a video self-portrait in which students must communicate their personalities using “the light, the camera position, by focusing the camera...” and an advertising campaign based on a great work of art.

Fake news is one of the core topics that any media education project should include, Massana suggested.

After years of experience with school radio, Rafecas considers it crucial that teachers are demanding so that students take these kinds of projects seriously.

In Valero’s classes, she always tries to connect the content with the students’ reality. Teachers must motivate them since they are the “protagonists”.

“You have to let them participate because the conversation is very rich,” she added.

4.6. Expertise, training, participation in media education projects

All the interviewees have participated in several media literacy projects. However, their experiences are quite different regarding the way they first approached the issue, their training and what they have put into practice inside and outside the classroom.

Blanes started working with Ferrés after studying audiovisual communication and working in advertising. It was then that her career as a media education lecturer at university kicked off.

Magrinyà had his first contact with media education when he started working as a Catalan language teacher at a high school. His training consisted of several radio and audiovisual communication courses.

Rafecas started working on radio content with no experience or training, as part of the Catalan language classes he was teaching. At the time, Estalella school had taken some ideas from the school project Radio Rapia.¹⁸

Masdeu was inspired by a friend who completed a cinema course and shared some material that could be used in the classroom. However, he didn't receive any training, which "makes it difficult to teach students".

Massana, who also said she had a lack of training, referred to a fake news project she completed within her science classes and to another initiative by EduCAC, on the use of smartphones among high school students.

After starting teaching audiovisual culture at a high school, Valero decided to do courses so that she could do her job the best way possible. "You have to do training continuously." She has been awarded the 'Premis el CAC a l'escola' [CAC school prizes] on several occasions.

Ambrós and Prats mentioned some initiatives relating to cinema projects and radio at the Barcelona schools Rambleta del Clot, Escola Solc, Sadako and Octavio Paz. In Prats' view, however, these are isolated cases and there is not a network of initiatives.

Ramis started using photography to teach children. He moved to Chile, where he launched 'Mediabus'¹⁹ in 2013, a bus with a radio studio inside that regularly visits schools. Ramis also launched the initiative 'Aula en Red' [Networked Classroom] to connect rural and urban schools with one another. He gave an example of the collaboration between a school in the remote village of Putaendo and a school in Barcelona through which the Spanish children taught online robotics classes to their Chilean peers.

When asked about the initiatives he knows, Alsíus listed Radio Estalella, Radio Sant Vicenç²⁰ and a cinema project at La Mina school in Barcelona.

4.7. Situation of media literacy and its future

According to the experts, the situation of media literacy is not promising. This is mainly due to three factors: a lack of interest from political authorities, a lack of training among teachers, and the fact that many people confuse media education with technology skills.

"There isn't a discussion about what to say and how to live in a society that is not ruled by written communication anymore, but by (audio)visual communication," Ramis said.

Ferrés recalled that, at an individual level, there are hundreds of "lone rangers", but there is a lack of interest and resources from the institutional point of view.

18. <<http://www.xtec.cat/ceip-sant-domenec-la-rapita/emisora/radorapia.htm>>.

19. <<https://i6900.wixsite.com/fundacionmediabus2/la-fundacion>>.

20. <<https://www.radiosvh.info/>>.

“Critical thinking is not what authorities like the most [...], but “if you are not optimistic, you can’t be an educator,” he added.

For Prats, it is crucial to provide teachers with content and resources. He also highlighted the increasing importance that co-teaching will have in the future.

“There is more awareness, and the industry is more open to it [...]. There are many people who believe in these kinds of projects,” he said.

“There is a growing interest among citizens, but it is still very poor among teachers,” Alsíus said.

The teachers interviewed focused on the lack of training, the importance of awareness and of making resources available for teachers, who are “overloaded with work” (Rafecas).

“The average age of faculty staff is over 45 and these people haven’t received any training” (Magrinyá).

“If teachers don’t take themselves to get training, we are at a dead end” (Valero).

Blanes believes that having points of reference is crucial to “spread” media literacy.

In Massana’s opinion, there are many topics and many ways to include media education in the classroom, but “there’s still a lot to do”.

Masdeu believes that the attitude of the teacher attitudes could make a difference. “I don’t think it is difficult (to start). What is needed is more awareness and the will to do it. I don’t believe that we need a lot of resources,” he said.

4.8. Students’ response to media education initiatives

Blanes said that students really enjoy these classes because they use “their own language”. Massana said the kids’ response is normally very good, while Masdeu mentioned their autonomy and creativity during the sessions. His role is what Magrinyá called the teacher-facilitator.

Magrinyá’s experience with teenagers is quite different, however. “At the end (of the school year), they would say ‘it wasn’t bad’, but their first reaction is ‘what a drag’,” he said.

Valero shared some students’ opinions on her classes: “It is the subject that has made me open my mind the most. It has made me more mature, and realise that we should not settle for what we have, with the world we have, but rather that we can do something to change it simply with a camera, a pencil or a brush.”

“This subject has helped me find a part of me that I didn’t know.”

Regarding the families’ responses to these initiatives, most teachers said that they were aware of these projects, although media literacy was not something they usually “demand” for their children. The school project Radio Estalella, however, was “the apple of their eye” and both kids and parents are very involved (Rafecas).

5. Discussion and conclusion

Experts in media education define media literacy as the ability to understand, interact and create audiovisual messages in a mature and autonomous way (Ferrés, 2007) according to ethical principles, while teachers agree with these aspects but provide a less technical definition.

The media has an enormous responsibility as educators (Ambrós and Breu, 2011), whether they want it or not, since they create images and role models for kids and teenagers. Their responsibility also includes the fight against disinformation (Aguaded and Romero-Rodríguez, 2015), especially when digital natives are not prepared to face this threat (Herrero-Curiel and La-Rosa, 2022).

The importance of access to media literacy programmes for primary school and high school students lies in their role as critical citizens (Butler, 2020; Ferrés et al., 2011) within a society dominated by images.

Critical analysis, knowledge of audiovisual languages (Ambrós and Breu, 2011) and resources for teachers are the core aspects that should be included in any media literacy programme. School radio, cinema and news projects seem to be the most common for boosting critical thinking and autonomous production skills among students in Catalonia.

The interviewees had different levels of training and expertise, and most of the teachers interviewed recognized that they had little or no training, while insisting this is indeed one of the main obstacles for media education in the short and long term (Butler, 2020; López-Romero and Aguaded-Gómez, 2012; Tiede and Grafe, 2016). The lack of support from political authorities and the need for more resources for teachers were also identified as considerable barriers. Other voices, however, said that the teacher's attitude and willingness were the aspects that would make a real difference. This confirms that "the commitment of teachers when properly resourced physically, culturally and intellectually seems to be the major factor in involvement in Media Education," (Hart, 1998b: 194) and that the creation of networks between teachers is also key to boosting media education (Ramírez-García and González-Fernández, 2016).

Student feedback is very illustrative of how media literacy serves as an empowerment factor that really changes the way they see and understand the world, according to the teachers interviewed.

Despite its limitations, this study offers valuable insights into media literacy in Catalonia, and its strengths, weaknesses and future challenges as described by experts and teachers. Future research should examine and update the situation of media literacy in other Spanish regions and different geographical areas characterised by high levels of social polarisation fuelled by disinformation. Studies on the perception of media literacy programmes among children and adults within formal and informal education would be relevant, too.

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