Media Education Practices

Media Literacy in Higher Education: Its presence in Communication and Education Degree Courses in Spanish Universities *

Prof. Dra. María Rocío Cruz-Díaz, PhD
Department of Education and Social Psichology, Faculty of Social Sciences
Pablo Olavide University, Seville (Spain). *mrcrudia@upo.es*
Prof. Dra. María Cinta Aguaded Gómez, PhD
Department of Education, Faculty of Education University of Huelva (Spain)
mariacinta.aguaded@dedu.uhu.es
Prof. Dra. Laura López Romero, PhD.
Department of Journalism. Faculty of Sciences de the Communication
University of Malaga (Spain) *lauralopezr@uma.es*

Abstract

This analysis, which forms part of an R&D project comprising thirteen Spanish universities with degree courses in Communication Studies (Audiovisual Communication, Journalism and Advertising) and Education (Teaching, Pedagogy, Psychopedagogy and Social Education), presents the needs and wants in media education within higher education. The presupposition is that media competence is essential for good university training, in line with the demands of society today. On this basis, the focus of this paper is an analysis of higher education textbooks. The results reveal non-existent or insufficient teaching provision of subjects directly related to media competence. At the same time, indirectly related subjects are mainly concerned with the technology dimension. We close the analysis with proposals and suggestions for broadening the curriculum spectrum.

Key words: Media literacy, Competence, Higher education, Communication, Education, Textbooks

1. Introduction

Nowadays, access to information and the latest knowledge, along with the desire and the ability to relate intelligently to this resource, is crucial for boosting competitiveness and improving the capacity for social and professional insertion as well as adaptability by the workforce in areas in which it may be developing. Digital and communicative competences are key skills for all university students in their boundless search for employment. As researchers we will explore the acquisition processes of performances and responses in higher education in relation to digital culture, virtual culture, electronic culture, etc.

The effective development of communication skills implies prior acquisition of competence in audiovisual communication, understood by J. Ferrés as "an individual's capacity to interpret and analyse through critical thinking images and audiovisual messages and to express oneself with minimal correction in the communication sphere" (2007, p. 102). The author attributes six broad dimensions to "competence in Audiovisual Communication in the digital era": languages, technology, ideology and values, production and diffusion, interaction and aesthetics. These dimensions are broken down into categories according to their analysis and expression. A. Gutiérrez – K. Tyner (2012) share criteria, given that today's world is considered global and intercultural, when they analyse education's role in curricular integration of the media as well as the required digital literacy, proposing a literacy for the 21st century: media, digital, multimodal, critical and functional (see: Buckinghan, 2005, Högerová, 2007, Košková, 2011, Parola, Ranieri, 2011). They also alert us to the danger of reducing media education to mere development of digital competence and its more technological and instrumental dimension, while neglecting attitudes and values. This implies the development of competences to enable people to overcome the much talked-about digital void and provide them with the potential to read, interact and be critical of technological resources and screens (Santibáñez, 2013). Literature demonstrates that a significant part of the population of student age is competent with the media at an acceptable level, but despite belonging to the generation of digital natives (M. Prensky, 2001), these natives do not possess the skills required to be media prosumers. They conclude by highlighting the need to complement the digital competence established in the education curriculum with media competence as a fundamental element for the development of a prosumer culture (Ramírez, Renés, Sánchez, 2013).

As a reflection of new models of digital literacy, innovative proposals are gradually being put forward, such as recommendations by the European Union drafted in the OECD-Agenda of Paris for Media Education (2007); initiatives by the European Parliament (2008); proposals by the ECC- European Commission Recommendation (2009); Spanish legislation within the general law of 2006

(Organic Law of Education, LOE); and reviews by the Ministry for Education and Science, (2011), among others.

The role of education has shifted, no longer focusing on decontextualized subject content, but rather on defining and inviting situations in which students can train and develop their competences or fundamental human qualities, that is, building, modifying and reformulating their knowledge, attitudes, feelings, beliefs and skills through a critical and creative approach. We might therefore question the new competences required from the citizen in the 21st century and, in particular, ask how competences are taught and assessed or accredited within the framework of higher education. To achieve the objectives set, contributions from experts in audiovisual competence in digital environments were taken as references (see: Aguaded, Ferrés, Cruz, Pérez, Sánchez, Delgado, 2011; Aguaded, Cruz-Díaz, 2014; Ferrés, 2006, 2007; Ferrés, Priscitelli, 2012) along with the indicators of dimensions defined in this competence in studies led by these experts.

2. Methodology

The study of media competence we are presenting forms part of the project "Media Competence. Research into the degree of competence of the citizen in Spain" (Ferrés and others, 2011) and offers a descriptive analysis of textbooks for Education and Communication degree courses. The population of Faculties and Higher Education Centres, which were the object of the study (20 selected in total), is distributed across Spain. The textbooks analysed are defined as those directly related to media competence. According to the indicators defined in the study by J. Ferrés and A. Piscitelli (2012) textbooks directly related to media competence are considered to be those that include indicators from at least five of the dimensions defined by the authors.

A qualitative scientific methodology was used based on the analysis of directly related textbooks from Spanish education and communication faculties according to the aforementioned media competence dimensions (languages, technology, production and diffusion processes, ideology and values, interaction processes and aesthetics) and the analysis and expression indicators.

The aim is to perform a rigorous and in-depth study of the incidence and importance of each of the media competence dimensions in the textbooks of education courses (Nursery Education, Primary Education, Pedagogy and Social Education) and communication courses (Communication, Journalism, Advertising and Cinema and TV), in their manifestations of analysis and expression. The purpose is to discover whether the presence of media competence is considered important within university studies in Spain.

The sample consisted of a total of 254 textbooks (179 for Education and 75 for Communication). A total of 43 media competence indicators were analysed in each textbook.

3. Data analysis and results

The results were entered into an SPSS software database to be statistically processed. A univariant and bivariant descriptive analysis was carried out, adopting the significance level of 0.05. Frequency tables were used for the univariant descriptive analysis and contingency tables for the bivariant analysis. We will present the descriptive features of the textbooks according to the variables (type of degree, course, year, subject category and their classification as directly or indirectly related to the study of the media competence) and subsequently the dimensions and their indicators.

3.1. Descriptive analysis of the textbooks

Tables 1 and 2 illustrate general aspects of the degree courses. Initially we look at the frequencies and percentages of the textbooks analysed for the education and the communication degrees while table 2 describes an analysis of textbooks for both education and communication degree courses, where we see a higher presence in those of nursery school and primary teaching and much lower for cinema and TV.

Table 1. Type of Faculty or centre

	Type	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Education	179	70.5	70.5	70.5
Valid	Communication	75	29.5	29.5	100.0
	Total	254	100.0	100.0	

Table 2. Type of course

	Course	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Nursery education	78	30.7	30.7	30.7
	Primary Education	60	23.6	23.6	54.3
	Pedagogy	19	7.5	7.5	61.8
	Social Education	22	8.7	8.7	70.5
Valid	Communication	28	11.0	11.0	81.5
	Journalism	24	9.4	9.4	90.9
	Advertising	21	8.3	8.3	99.2
	Cine and TV	2	.8	.8	100.0
	Total	254	100.0	100.0	

A notable finding regarding the academic year is that most subjects that include media competence studies are taught in the first years of each degree course. This is common to both education and communication courses.

Table 3. Academic year.

	Year	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	First	87	34.3	37.0	37.0
	Second	48	18.9	20.4	57.4
Valid	Third	56	22.0	23.8	81.3
	Fourth	44	17.3	18.7	100.0
	Total	235	92.5	100.0	
Missing	System	19	7.5		
Total		254	100.0		

Most of the subjects in the textbooks analysed are for basic training, while compulsory rather than optional subjects are the most frequent and indirect textbooks have more weight than those directly related to media competence.

3.2. Analysis of media competence according to its dimensions

As indicated in the methodology section, we will now present in detail the data obtained from the analysis of the language, technology, production and diffusion processes, ideology and values, interaction and aesthetics dimensions described by J. Ferrés - A. Pricitelli (2012) in communication and education textbooks in Spanish universities. The tables show the comparative data established according to the total books analysed, with no distinction as to whether they belong to communication or education.

3.2.1. Languages dimension – over the total textbooks

The most significant indicators have been highlighted for the Languages dimension: these include: capacity to interpret and assess the representation codes and their expressive function; capacity to analyse and assess narrative structures and the conventions of genre and format; capacity to establish relationships between texts -intertextuality-, codes and media and; capacity to express themselves in a multimodal manner. The indicators relating to 'presence or non-presence of items of the language dimension' were discarded due to their null and/or insignificant representativeness (cumulative percentage 52.0).

Table 4. Capacity to interpret and assess representation codes and their expressive function.

CodiLeng1		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	No	166	65.4	65.4	65.4
Valid	Yes	88	34.6	34.6	100.0
	Total	254	100.0	100.0	

The expressive function and the capacity to interpret and assess codes are insufficiently represented in textbooks. In over 65% this indicator does not appear. The indicator 'capacity to analyse and assess the narrative structures and conventions of genre and format' is included in just 15% of textbooks, meaning

they are absent in the very high majority of 85%. In both the indicators 'capacity for establishing relationships between texts – intertextuality - codes and media', and 'the capacity for expressing themselves in a multimodal manner' are not represented in the textbooks, with similar percentages (12.2 and 11.8) and, therefore, very high percentages (87.8 and 88.2) in which no presence is detected.

3.2.2. Technology Dimension – Over the total textbooks

For the Technology dimension, the following can be highlighted as among the most significant indicators, this time for their scarce presence: comprehension of the social function of technology (cumulative percentage 39.0); presence or not of items of the technology dimension (cumulative percentage of 31.0); capacity to function effectively in hypermedia, transmedia and multimodal environments, which goes up to a cumulative percentage of 70.1. The capacity to handle multimedia and multimodal tools has a null consideration and/or insignificant representativeness with a cumulative percentage of 53.9.

Table 5. Comprehension of the social function of technology.

CodiTecno1		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	No	99	39.0	39.0	39.0
Valid	Yes	155	61.0	61.0	100.0
	Total	254	100.0	100.0	

In the technology dimension the presence is higher. This is shown in its indicators such as social comprehension and the technology dimension where they have a percentile of 61 and 68, in contrast to textbooks that have no presence of these indicators. The indicator that measures the capacity to function effectively in hypermedia, transmedia and multimodal environments has a smaller presence in the guides, with a percentile of 29.9.

3.2.3. Interaction processes dimension – over the total textbooks

It is highly significant that the interaction processes (receipt and audiences) have total indicators with a cumulative profile of over 90% in all cases, thus: capacity for selection and assessment of own media diet; capacity for comprehension and management of own emotions in terms of preferences and for cognitive purposes; basic knowledge of the concept of audience and audience studies; capacity to interact with people and groups in increasingly diverse and intercultural environments. Only the presence or not of items of the Interaction Processes dimension drops slightly to 81.5%.

A non-existent representation of media competence can be observed in this dimension and in all its indicators. The lowest is the capacity to manage own emotions, followed by the capacity to interact with people and groups in diverse and intercultural environments.

Table 6. Presence or not of items of the Interaction Processes dimension.

CodiProcIntTotal		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	207	81.5	81.5	81.5
	Yes	47	18.5	18.5	100.0
	Total	254	100.0	100.0	

3.2.4. Production and Diffusion processes dimension – over the total textbooks

As in the previous dimension, only the presence or not of items of the Production Processes dimension reflects a balanced percentage at 53.1, which is insignificant in terms of the presence or not of items.

Table 7. Presence or not of items of the Production Processes dimension

CodiProcProdTotal		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	135	53.1	53.1	53.1
	Yes	119	46.9	46.9	100.0
	Total	254	100.0	100.0	

The rest of the indicators with a cumulative profile that fluctuates between 94.9 and 78.3 is significant: knowledge of production systems, programming and dissemination and underlying interests; knowledge of the regulatory and self-regulatory codes and an active and responsible attitude towards them; capacity to work together in creating multimedia and multimodal products; capacity to exchange and disseminate information through different communication environments; responsible attitude towards own online/offline identity and that of others; capacity to manage the concept of individual and collective authorship and skill in using resources such as creative commons.

Table 8. Responsible attitude to own online/offline identity and that of others.

CodiProcProd5		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	241	94.9	94.9	94.9
	Si	13	5.1	5.1	100.0
	Total	254	100.0	100.0	

In the Production Processes dimension, it can be seen that the 'no' percentages are higher than the 'yes' in all its indicators: capacity to exchange and disseminate information through different communication environments and responsible attitude to own online/offline identity and that of others. Likewise, very little is presented in the capacity to manage the concept of individual or collective authorship and skill in using resources such as creative commons, with

non-existence of this competence standing at a percentile of 93.3   and thus a presence of only 6.7.

3.2.5. Ideology and Values Dimension – over the total textbooks

For the dimension focused on Ideology and Values, the indicators possess high cumulative profiles in all the capacities identified: capacity for selection and assessment of own media diet; capacity for assessing the reliability of information sources and to search for, organize, compare, prioritize and synthesize information from different environments; capacity to detect explicit or latent ideology and values even in inadvertent communications and adopting a critical attitude towards them; ethical attitude when downloading products from the Web; capacity to detect stereotypes and immoral messages against human values and the environment; capacity to manage own emotions in interacting with screens according to the ideology and values conveyed through them; capacity to use new communication tools to convey values and to contribute to improving the environment. Meanwhile, the presence or not of items of the Ideology dimension remains at a score of 55.9 cumulative percentage.

Table 9. Presence or not of items of the Ideology dimension.

CodiIdeologTotal		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	142	55.9	55.9	55.9
	Yes	112	44.1	44.1	100.0
	Total	254	100.0	100.0	

An absence in textbooks of the indicator for critical thinking towards explicit values and inadvertent communications can also be observed in media competence (22.8). This is highly significant, as a dimension as eminently important as ethical attitude when downloading products from the Web has a non-representativeness of 96.1 and a presence percentage therefore of only 3.9. Likewise, the capacity to detect stereotypes and immoral messages has a very small presence- 10.6 compared to its absence of 89.4. A capacity as necessary as that of managing own emotions when interacting with screens is even lower than the aforementioned, just 6.7 of presence compared to 93.3 of absence. There is a very small presence too - 18.9 compared to 81.1 of absence – in the capacity of using new communication tools to convey values and contribute to enhancing the environment.

3.2.6. Aesthetics dimension – Over the total textbooks

Lastly, the aesthetics dimension. The total of indicators with a cumulative profile of around 95 points is highly significant. The capacities and indicators are as follows: capacity to extract pleasure from formal aspects, that is, not just what is communicated but also how it is communicated; sensitive attitude towards media productions that do not adhere to minimum requirements of aesthetic quality; capacity to relate media productions to other artistic manifestations, detecting

mutual influences; capacity to identify basic aesthetic categories, such as formal and thematic innovation, originality, style, schools and trends; capacity to produce individual or collective messages with minimum levels of creativity, originality and sensitivity; capacity to obtain and transform artistic productions, encouraging creativity, innovation, experimentation and aesthetic sensitivity; presence or not of items of the Aesthetics dimension.

Regarding the capacities linked to the Aesthetics Dimension, it is of great concern that any of its manifestations, those related to formal aspects of aesthetics as well as those regarding attitudes and capacities to produce and identify basic aesthetic categories, are all non-existent in the textbooks of our university degree courses, fluctuating between a minimum presence of 0.8 in sensitive attitude to media productions and their aesthetic quality requirements, to a maximum of 5.9 in the capacity of relating media productions to other artistic manifestations. The presence of indicators in the Aesthetics Dimension is barely 12.6 present compared to an absence percentage of 87.4.

Conclusions and proposals

The results of the study lead us to conclude that the presence of media competence in university textbooks in both education and communication degree courses is insufficient. This shortfall can be seen in textbooks of materials and subjects directly related to media competence rather than those not related. The data show that in Spanish universities indirectly related textbooks carry more weight than those directly related in both education and communication degree courses. The presence of media competence dimensions and capacities in textbooks is greater in the first years and in basic subjects rather than in optional ones. The technology dimension with all its indicators has a higher presence than all the others, while such imperative dimensions as ideology and aesthetics are scarcely considered in all their indicators.

Given the importance of student training in digital literacy and competence in media, the stance taken by educational institutions is perplexing. One of the fundamental changes in the new communication environment is the establishment of what has been called the era of the prosumer, the era in which an individual has as many opportunities to produce and disseminate own messages as to consume those by other people. Early training should then correlate with the continuous training students will need when they join the workforce. Keeping university separate from the demands of a job position is not ethical. We need to reconsider curricula and academic teaching and, rather than focus them on what the teacher might be trained in, concentrate instead on what students need.

The capacity of students to produce their own messages and to interpret those by others is a necessary competence for the demands of society today. Thus the dimensions and indicators of this proposal are structured around two

comprehensive working areas: analysis and expression. That is, a person must develop his/her media competence by interacting critically with messages produced by others and be capable of producing and disseminating own messages (Ferrés, Priscitelli, 2012).

The objective sought by researchers and specialists in analysing the media is to train the citizen in becoming aware of emotions derived from images and to be able to construct critical thought, turning this capacity for analysis, this delight in aesthetics into new sources of satisfaction (López, Aguaded, 2015, p.193). However, through this study it can be seen that they are not present in university student training, at least in the textbooks of Spanish universities of education and communication degrees.

Therefore, we consider training and learning proposals in educommunication in Spain to be fundamental. In the words of C. Marta – M. Grandío (2013, p. 127), "media literacy is a life-long learning task that must be formalized with greater presence in the curricula at all educational levels and also in non-formal education for adults". The proposals to improve this shortcoming must mandatorily be included by State institutions, initially providing them with an overview of what is being taught in classrooms today along with a real vision of media literacy recorded by citizens and that has recently been examined, as shown in this article.

Confronted by media illiteracy, it falls to the education community to demand proposals for teacher training, the inclusion of teaching material and for media training to be included in the classroom (López, Aguaded, 2015). These data should encourage the institutions responsible for the design of university degree courses to reflect. It is, after all, under their tutorship that millions of students will be trained and will then be responsible for training many others, along with the dissemination of responsible communication.

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