AN ANALYSIS OF THE UNIVERSITY TEACHERS’ CONTEXT IN KYRGYZSTAN TO SUPPORT MEDIA AND INFORMATION LITERACY (MIL)

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**INTRODUCTION**

In its early years, Information Communications Technology was perceived with much optimism due to its democratic tendencies in regard to the accessibility and dissemination of information. Its proponents believed that technologies gave a voice to the conventionally marginalized members of the public. They created opportunities for open public debate and expression of opinions, and enhanced access to and dissemination of information. People, who are well acquainted with the new digital technologies can benefit from its use tremendously, but they are also vulnerable. Risks and threats accompany this positive development, often in parallel to those that already exist in the offline world. This includes such phenomena as hate speech, extremism and radicalization. Additionally, rapid development of online technologies has widened a knowledge gap between different age groups, societies and countries. In many cases recruiters use such qualities of the social media as virality and immediacy to reach vulnerable youth. In parallel attempts to prevent the spread of radicalization online have created challenges for freedom of expression.

Since its foundation, UNESCO has been at the forefront of global thinking about the impact of the changing information, communication, media, and education landscape. In 2013 UNESCO issued a resolution on ethical and societal challenges of the information society and later in 2015 UNESCO’s Executive Board adopted a decision, which underscored a unique role of UNESCO in leading “activities designed to assist Member States in promoting and implementing education as an essential tool to help prevent violent extremism, promote peace and human rights education, and education for sustainable development.”[[1]](#footnote-1) It referred also to the UN’s Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy adopted in 2006 by General Assembly resolution 60/288, which encouraged UNESCO to play a key role in regard to measures to address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism. Therefore, UNESCO developed a Global Media and Information Literacy (MIL) Framework, which provides policy makers with evidence on which steps should be made to provide populations with media and information competences, which will help them to benefit from the technological advances and grow resilience towards information challenges.

According to UNESCO MIL is one of the preconditions of sustainable development and that literate use of information, media and ICT tools will help populations benefit from the freedom of expression and access to information[[2]](#footnote-2).

**BACKGROUND**

UNESCO defines MIL as “a set of competencies that empowers citizens to access, retrieve, understand, evaluate and use, to create as well as share information and media content in all formats, using various tools, in a critical, ethical and effective way, in order to participate and engage in personal, professional and societal activities”[[3]](#footnote-3). This definition describes the competencies and level of proficiency to be obtained by citizens on MIL: (i) access and retrieval; (ii) understanding and evaluation; (iii) creation and sharing. The questions included in the survey naturally sought to access these three competencies. In the context of Kyrgyzstan, this research has a double purpose.

In addition to evaluating media, information and digital literacy, it also helped to understand an overall awareness of teachers about the use, causes of and potential of the Internet in spreading online violent extremism and countering the phenomena. This is directly linked to the needs request by the Government of Kyrgyzstan, in particular by the Ministry of Education and Science on mainstreaming MIL in education sector as to contribute to ongoing measures on prevention of violent extremism, which has become a challenge over the past few years. According to a number of research, over the past years between 2,000 and 4,000 thousand youth from Central Asia have been recruited as foreign fighters by violent extremist groups; among them are around 800 Kyrgyz citizens[[4]](#footnote-4). Local youth continue to be the preferred demographic for recruiters in the region to pick from, while social media are one of the recruiters’ preferred tools.

In 2017, the Kyrgyz government approved its first national program and action plan on combatting terrorism and extremism. The action plan lays out a number of tasks that relevant government agencies need to implement by 2022, in cooperation with civil society and the international community, in some cases. The bulk of the action plan is focused on a comprehensive approach to countering and preventing extremism. Thus, according to official data, 36 online platforms were closed in 2018 on the grounds of spreading terrorism and extremism[[5]](#footnote-5). Overall, a number of research suggest that the definition of extremism in Kyrgyzstan is broad and includes a long list of actions which focus more on terrorism-related activities, ranging from violent change to the fundamentals of the constitutional order to incitement of hostility[[6]](#footnote-6).

In terms of prevention, the Ministry of Education, in cooperation with the State Commission for Religious Affairs, in particular, are tasked with developing and implementing a new curriculum for high school students on moderate Islam and identifying terrorist recruitment tactics[[7]](#footnote-7). The curriculum will be supplemented with a teaching aid to help teachers navigate through this new course. The curriculum is viewed as a measure to prevent religious extremism and develop critical attitude towards extremism and terrorism among youth. In the meanwhile, local and international organizations remain the driving force in promoting the use of education in the violent extremism prevention. However, at this stage the full potential of education in preventing the spread of violent extremism remains underutilized in Kyrgyzstan.

In order to support the Kyrgyz government and the Ministry of Education to further promote the importance of education in preventing and countering extremism, UNESCO commissioned the Media and Information Literacy Assessment. The Information for All Programme (IFAP) and the UNESCO Office in Almaty are providing the necessary support in the prevention of online violent extremism in accordance with the UN Secretary-General’s Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism.

The Assessment was conducted in Kyrgyzstan in several stages. The survey was preceded by a two-day workshop in Bishkek on Media and Information Literacy and the UNESCO Global MIL Assessment Framework for 27 participants from the state universities, Ministry of Education and Science, Academy of Science of the Kyrgyz Republic, civil society organizations, and mass media. The workshop, organized on 17 and 18 July 2019, served the purpose of adapting the UNESCO MIL Competency Matrix to local contextual data. Based on the input received from the workshop participants the questionnaires were used in a survey covering teachers/lecturers at the local universities in Kyrgyzstan. The outcomes of the survey have been analysed and collated into this report.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The MIL framework was developed to answer the overarching question: Do conditions exist at national levels that favor the acquisition of MIL competencies among teachers? With this in mind the survey is organized around the following research questions:

• What are the current computer literacy skills of teachers?

• Can teachers access and use media and information technologies in the universities,

in households and how can they access computer tools in the universities?

• What is the media and information literacy level of teachers? Is it sufficient to foster MIL among students?

• Can teachers access and use media and information technologies in their households?

• Can teachers create content?

• Is teachers’ media and information literacy sufficient to counteracting extremism?

**METHODOLOGY**

In line with the requirements of the project, selected respondents consisted of university teachers specializing in arts and humanities from 22 high education institutions located in seven major cities: Bishkek, Osh, Naryn, Talas, Jalalabad, Batken, Issyk-Kul. For the purpose of this research, universities teaching arts and humanities were included in the sample. The total number of teachers identified at the universities, which fit the criteria was 9,247. A snowball sampling method was used to select a sample of 207 university teachers. The surveys were administered by consultants, who met each respondent in person. The surveys were available in two languages: Kyrgyz and Russian.

The UNESCO MIL Assessment Framework was used for the survey, but contextualized to the Kyrgyzstan context. The face-to-face surveys were paper-based and available in Kyrgyz and Russian languages. A polling company RichResearch was recruited to conduct the survey and provide assistance to the respondents in the case of language or/and other uncertainties. The questions asked in the survey were split into four thematic sections, which correspond to three UNESCO MIL competences as well as extremism prevention. Section B sought to assess the level of technical competency of teachers as well as the accessibility of tools and methods to access, retrieve and hold information. Participants were also asked to rate their own familiarity and confidence with performing tasks on a computer. Section C provided teachers with an opportunity to assess their level of understanding of information and media. Section D provided an overview of the respondents' skills to create information content based on their self-assessment. The last section E offered an insight into the level of understanding among the teachers of the extremism threat in Kyrgyzstan and ways of preventing it. The data was collected between in October 2019.

**RESULTS**

**A. RESPONDENT GROUPS AND PROFILES**

According to Table 1, research sample comprised of 207 teachers coming from 22 universities employing 9,247 teachers. Fifteen out of 22 universities or 68% of all universities are located in the capital Bishkek, two are located in Osh and the rest six are located in six regional cities each. Gender distribution in the sample included 83.6% of female and 16.4% male teachers, which does not vary significantly from the total teacher population in Kyrgyzstan.

**Table 1**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Title**  | **% of respondents** |
| Bishkek Humanities University named after K. Karasaev | 4.8 |
| Kyrgyz National University named after J. Balasagyn | 4.8 |
| Academy of Tourism | 4.3 |
| Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Kyrgyz Republic | 4.3 |
| Mahmoud Kashgari-Barskani Eastern University | 4.3 |
| Kyrgyz State University Of Construction And Architecture | 4.3 |
| Kyrgyz State Law Academy | 4.3 |
| Kyrgyz National Agrarian University | 4.3 |
| Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University | 4.3 |
| Kyrgyz State Technical University named after I. Razzakov | 4.3 |
| Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University | 4.3 |
| Kyrgyz Economic University | 4.3 |
| Ala-Too International University | 4.3 |
| International University of Kyrgyzstan | 4.3 |
| Osh State University | 4.8 |
| Osh Technical University | 4.8 |
| Naryn State University | 4.8 |
| Talas State University | 4.8 |
| Batken State University | 4.8 |
| Jalal-Abad State University | 4.8 |
| Issyk-Kul State University  | 4.8 |
| Total | 100.0 |

The majority of teachers reported having a Bachelor’s degree as their highest education level (69.1%), and almost one fifth of the respondents had Master’s degree (21.7%). An average age of teachers is 39 years old, which means few of 207 teachers, could be considered “digital natives”. Only 44% of all respondents were teachers, while the rest belong to the categories of senior teachers, heads of departments or associated professors. The age group between 22-31 years old was mostly represented in the category of teachers (97.8%), while the age group above 32 years old mostly populated the rest categories. A large group of respondents turned out teaching languages (Kyrgyz language - 25.6%, foreign languages - 21.3%, and Russian language - 12.6%). These group is mostly populated by female teachers. Male teachers reported to teach Economy (11.8%), Management (8.8%) and Philosophy (8.8%) in addition to krgyz and foreign languages (14.7% each).

**B. COMPUTER LITERACY SKILLS AND ACCESS TO COMPUTER TOOLS**

Gauging teachers’ accessibility and usage of media and information and communication technologies is key to understanding the extent to which they can foster media and information literacy. Whether or not teachers access and use various MIL-related tools and resources at home or in public places also can provide further insight for drawing broader conclusions about current practices, behaviours and attitudes to inform decisions and policy-making.

**Basic ICT skills and training**

In order to assess teacher trainers’ basic ICT skills and training, participants were asked to respond to general questions oriented towards their familiarity with computers, formal computer training backgrounds, and whether or not they used email.

Almost all respondents (99.5%) have confirmed they have used computer with 59.4% admitting to having passed computer literacy courses. Out of the remaining 40.1% of respondents, 33.8% are self-taught computer users. Less than half of the respondents had computer classes at a school or university (41.1%) or as part of their on-job training (43.5%). Overall, 84.5% of respondents decided to learn computer skills at their own initiative; the percent of female teachers in this category is slightly higher (87.3%) than male teachers (66.7%). Two thirds of male teachers acquired computer skills with the assistance of their colleagues. Almost all respondents (97.1%) use electronic mail for work or private purposes.

**Teachers’ confidence performing computer tasks**

In order to gather additional information related to teachers’ current situation, data on their confidence level when performing a variety of computer-related tasks were gathered to help measure teachers’ MIL competencies.

Assessing teacher trainers’ confidence with ICT technologies provides a good indication of the current potential for ICT knowledge dissemination within the current and evolving education system. Teachers may not be able to introduce their students to knowledge, methodologies or technologies that they themselves are unfamiliar with. Therefore, this evaluation will help policy makers better understand as to which kind of ICT skills might be at risk of not being transferred to or fostered in students. It also helps inform potential interventions to support teachers to mainstream MIL into their teaching and lesson planning regardless of subject.

Teachers were offered to self-assess their level of technological savviness and computer literacy.

They were offered a list of competences ranging from a basic task to “open a file in a specific folder” to a more complicated tasks such as “create a spreadsheet” or “perform an on-line payment” and asked to rank their ability to perform these activities on a scale from 0 to 4, where 0 means lack of skills or experience and 4 means advanced user.

According to Table 2, teachers in general from all age groups (an average of more than 80%) rated themselves highly confident when dealing with basic offline computer tasks. Items such as “opening”, “creating” and “saving of files” scored highly with the majority of respondents evaluating themselves as near expert. There was a small percent of respondents from the age group between 22 and 31, who ranked these basic skills at 1 and 2 (4.4% and 11.1% respectively). A breakdown of cities shows that the representatives of this group come from Bishkek, Osh, Karakol and Talas. Overall, the respondents of all age groups ranked as advanced their skills of searching for information on the internet (75.4%), downloading materials from the internet (78.3%) and downloading files (71.5%).

Levels of confidence dropped to midrange when dealing with more technical programmes like Excel or having to prepare a presentation on a computer. The highest percent of respondents, who have 0 skills of making PowerPoint presentations is in the age group older than 52 (15.6%), and come mostly from Batken, Jalal-Abad, Osh and Bishkek. Fewer than 10% of representatives of all age groups have zero skills of dealing with spreadsheets; in terms of geographical location, the majority of these respondents originate from Jalal-Abad (30-40% - zero skills and only 10%-20% - advanced skills).

The lowest level of confidence was observed in tasks related to online processes like using online payment or cloud services. For example, participation in on-line discussions on current events (only 39.6% ranked their skills as advanced and 14.5% have zero skills), using on-line services provided by the Government (33.8% ranked their skills as advanced and 23.2% have zero skills), performing on-line payments (38.2% - advanced and 29.0% - zero skills), and using cloud services (27.1% - advanced and 33.3% - zero skills). Although, the percentage of those who stated they have 0 level skills is almost the same across all age groups, the percentage of those who ranked their skills as advanced in the age group older than 52 is twice smaller compared to those in other groups in such categories as “participation in on-line discussions”, “use of on-line services provided by the Government” and “perform on-line payments”. The difference is much bigger in the category “use cloud services”: close to 35% have advanced skills in the age group between 22 and 41 and only more than 12% of respondents in the age category between 42 and older than 62 claimed tier skills are advanced.

Overall self-assessment levels claimed by female and male teachers are very much alike. However, female teachers tend to have a slightly higher percent of advanced users (4) as compared to male teachers. On the contrary, percent of those who have ranked themselves as confident user (3) is higher among male teachers as compared to their female peers. The only exception is the ability to use Excel files, which is slightly higher among male teachers (60.6% ranked their skills as advanced vs 50.6% of advanced among female teachers), and use of online services like online payment, where male teachers’ level of confidence is much lower as compared to their female peers: 40.5% of advanced users among female teachers vs 27.1% of advanced male teachers.

**Table 2**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Task** | **Rating** |
| Open a file from specific folder | 83.6%  |
| Safe a file in specified folder  | 83.6%  |
| Create a text file | 82.1% |
| Download materials from special Internet resources to prepare lectures/ workshops, etc.  | 78.3%  |
| Search information in the Internet/ use web browsers  | 75.4%  |
| Create files, use catalogue system, for example, distribute collected information by topic folders on your computer, create archives, etc.  | 72.9% |
| Download/ store/ share files  | 71.5%  |
| Make presentations | 58.9%  |
| Create a spreadsheet (Excel and others) | 51.2%  |
| Perform basic operations in the tables (add columns, simple arithmetic and mathematic functions) | 51.7% |
| Create charts using tables or similar software  | 45.4%  |
| Participate in on-line discussions on current events  | 39.6%  |
| Perform on-line payment | 38.2%  |
| Use on-line services provided by the Government.  | 33.8%  |
| Use cloud services | 27.1%  |

**Availability and usage of ICT devices in universities**

In addition to the ability to use ICT, the survey sought to assess technical capacity of the universities and whether the teachers use the equipment available at the universities. Modern technical equipment will allow the teachers to deliver their classes in a more efficient manner. Table 3 shows that according to the teachers’ assessment, the universities are well equipped and teachers in general use the equipment.

**Table 3**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Equipment** | **Accessibility**  | **Usage** |
| Radio cabin | 38.6% | 8.2% |
| Video camera/photo camera | 83.6% | 33.8% |
| Computer / laptop  | 99.0% | 96.1% |
| Printer | 96.6% | 88.4% |
| Scanner | 87.4% | 60.4% |
| Copy machine (Xerox) | 88.4% | 67.1% |
| Data storage cards, hard disks, flash cards, etc. | 92.8% | 87.9% |
| CD or DVD  | 84.5% | 70% |
| Projector | 93.2% | 83.1% |
| Mobile communication (Smartphone, tablet, etc.) | 89.9% | 83.6% |

Disaggregated by areas, the results show that teachers from Batken seem to be less technologically equipped in terms of video/photo cameras (20%), scanners (40%), copy machines (60%), CD/DVD (60%), projector (40%), mobile communication (60%). This insufficient accessibility of equipment is equally reflected in the application of this equipment. Teachers from Jalal-Abad are doing slightly better than their peers in Batken, but still much worse compared to colleagues from other cities: availability of video/photo cameras (40%), scanners (40%), data storage cards (60%) and CD or DVD (50%). Notable is the lack of disparities in the use of the technical equipment between different age and gender groups.

The respondents were also surveyed on the availability of the Internet in their place of work. The overwhelming majority of teachers 90.3% reported to have limitless access to the internet in their workplace, and only 1.4% noted they do not have internet access (10% of those come from Osh and 0.7% from Bishkek). The survey did not include a question about the use of the Internet in the universities, which makes it difficult to understand whether the teachers actually use the Internet during the classes. It may be interesting to clarify this question in further surveys. The access to the Internet among different age groups have not revealed any disparities.

*Outcomes of this part of the survey demonstrate that while teachers can cope with basic offline tasks, they however feel less confident dealing with more complex programs like Excel or PowerPoint presentations as well as more advanced online technologies like use of e-government services. This result suggests that teachers, mostly in the older age group, lack experience of using new digital technologies, such e-government, and cannot evaluate the positive impact of these technologies on social and political life. This implies that the teachers need to improve the skills required to effectively put into practice UNESCO Competency 5 “Applying New and Traditional Media Formats.”[[8]](#footnote-8) The results summed up in these sections point out to low potential for using certain online digital technologies in the classroom and for passing on this knowledge from teachers to students. On top of that teachers most likely will not be able to use these new technologies to create an effective bond with school-based and out-of-school learning, especially for students who are becoming alienated from school. In the meanwhile, these two abilities of teachers - use and disseminate new ICT knowledge - form an integral part of the UNESCO competencies for teachers, in particular Competence 7 “Promoting MIL Among Students and Managing Required Changes”[[9]](#footnote-9). Teachers’ ability to use more complex programmes and online digital technologies should be improved through some formal training to ensure that these skills are not at risk of not being transferred to students. At the same time relatively high level of availability of ICT equipment and Internet connection at universities creates an environment conducive to mastering new skills by teachers. The gap between the level of ICT equipment availability between rural and urban areas needs to be addressed to create a level playing ground for teachers seeking improvement. High level of Internet penetration and use, in particular on mobile phones, makes feasible launching of online /distance education programmes, including related to MIL, which can be efficient given that teachers are open to the idea of self-study.*

**C. MEDIA AND INFORMATION LITERACY**

**Availability and usage of ICT devices in households**

A better understanding of a household context provides an important perspective on the general level of media literacy among teachers. Teachers as the main medium of knowledge for students should not only have theoretical knowledge of media literacy but also apply it in everyday life. This information becomes particularly useful for education stakeholders to develop more effective policies to foster media literacy targeting teachers.

According to Table 4 television is available in majority of teacher’s homes (95.7%) with an average time spent on watching television is 2.87 hours per day. Computers are also generally available to teachers with 89.4% reporting access and slightly over 3 hours of daily use. Noticeably, fewer teachers have access to radio and an e-reader represented by rate of 23.2% and 13.5% with an average daily use of 1.5 hours in both cases. Lastly, 85.0% and 92.3% of teachers have smartphones and mobile phones respectively with an average time spent on each device reaching up to 6.66 and 7.83 hours per day respectively.

**Table 4**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Equipment | Availability  | Usage (hours per day) |
| TV  | 95.7% | 2.87 |
| Mobile phone | 92.3% | 7.83 |
| Computer/laptop/tablet  | 89.4% | 3.17 |
| Smartphone (operation system IOS, Android/Windows)  | 85.0% | 6.66 |
| Radio | 23.2% | 1.52 |
| Reader – for reading e-books | 13.5% | 1.50 |

The results of the survey suggest availability is somewhat related to usage whereas devices most often available are used most frequently. However, while television and computers/laptops are available in the majority of households (i.e. the 1st and the 3rd most common), they are used twice less frequently compared to smartphones and mobile phones. E-readers and radios are least often used. No disparities between different gender groups have been revealed.

To add more specifics to the relationship between the availability of the devices in households and location, data were disaggregated geographically. While few substantial differences were observed, it is noteworthy that a small percent of respondents who do not have television is based in two major cities Bishkek and Osh and fall into the age category between 22 and 41. Bishkek and Osh are also the only two cities, where teachers reported using e-readers. The device is popular among the age group 32-51. Perhaps this group of respondents has voluntary chosen not to have a television at home. It may be interesting to clarify this question in further surveys. The level of consumption of television programmes is relatively the same among all age groups. Smartphones are less common in Jalal-Abad and Osh at rates 20% and 60% respectively compared to the average accessibility rate of 90% in all other areas. In addition, respondents in Osh reported 10.92 hours of average daily use of smartphones which is five times more than an average use reported in Jalal-Abad. At the same time despite the high availability of smartphones in Naryn, an average usage is slightly more than 3 hours.

The survey also sought to assess access to the Internet of teachers outside the university premises. Total of 49.4% respondents reported having access to unlimited mobile Internet, 31.4% - unlimited Internet from an internet provider, 15.7% - limited mobile Internet and only 3.4% claimed hay have no internet access at all. No substantial disparities are observed between different age groups in accessing mobile Internet and Internet from a provider. Geographically disaggregated data shows that except for teachers from Bishkek, their peers from other areas prefer using mobile Internet, both limited and unlimited. Almost 36% of those who use limited internet, reported spending 10Gb per week. No disparities between different gender groups have been revealed.

**Access and usage of media and information in households**

Prior to designing interventions in improving media literacy level among the teachers it is important to dig into habits of media/information consumption, barriers to access and the information channels available to the teachers. Combined with the assessment of how teachers understand and critically evaluate information and media, this knowledge will be particularly relevant for decision-making related to capacity-building. Firstly, available information helps reveal strengths and weaknesses of teachers’ current level of media literacy and thus informs training interventions. Secondly, collected data will show how to best reach teachers, depending on which media channels are used most frequently.

Table 5 shows that the respondents use a wide variety of sources to receive information. The respondents were offered to name several sources they use. The social media tops the list followed by television, online news agencies, social network messengers and print media. Among other resources, which were reported as the main source of information by 5.7%, the respondents named Azattyk.kg, 24.kg and Akipress.kg.

**Table 5**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Information channel**  | **Percent of respondents** |
| Social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc) | 16.6% |
| Television | 16.4% |
| Online news agencies  | 11.8% |
| Messengers (WhatsApp, Telegram, Viber, etc)  | 10.3% |
| Newspapers/magazines | 10.0% |
| Books | 7.1% |
| Video hosting (Youtube, Retube, Namba, Blive, etc.) | 6.7% |
| Colleagues/friends/relatives | 6.2% |
| Other online sources (websites of state institutions, private companies, NGOs, forums, etc)  | 5.7% |
| Libraries/archives | 5.2% |
| Radio | 4.0% |

Understanding the different patterns of media usage amongst different age, gender and area groups is important for developing effective policies and effective interventions to ensure access is available across groups. Social media as information channels are more popular among male than female teachers. Similarly, it is used more frequently by the age group 22 to 41, while 42 to 52 and older rated this medium as the second most popular option after television. Age group 22 to 31 is tilting more towards social media for getting information, including such channels as messengers and video hostings, although television still pops up as a second popular medium of information. An earlier research by the Media Policy Institute showed that young people often watch television as part of a family pastime[[10]](#footnote-10).

Disaggregated by area results of the survey show that social media is reported as the main source of information in Osh, while in Bishkek, Karakol, Batken and Talas teachers treat as equally important social media and television. The latter is a preferred source of information in Naryn and Jalal-Abad.

Table 6 shows what type of information the respondents look for on television, in the Internet, etc. On a daily basis, slightly over 50% of respondents look for general information about current affairs, related to teaching activity and self-education. The respondents demonstrated slightly less interest in following developments in the education system. Perhaps this is related to the lack of developments in the system of education, poor public relations capacity of the Ministry of Education or little interest of the media in the sphere of education. However, a cumulative sum of these two answers - “for teaching activity” and “for work” - which are interrelated to some, show that the primary interest of the respondents is work and education related topics. The least interest evokes topics related to entertainment and issues related to extremism and terrorism. Data disaggregated by gender shows that male and female teacher have different interest in the topics offered in the survey. Thus, male respondents are more curious than female in general information about current affairs, security situation and entertainment, while female respondents have more interest in work-related topics.

**Table 6**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|   | **Every day** | **3-5 times a week** | **1-2 times a week** | **Less than once a week** | **Never**  |
| General awareness of the current situation | 56.0 | 16.4 | 14.0 | 7.7 | 5.8 |
| For teaching activity  | 59.4 | 27.1 | 8.7 | 3.4 | 1.4 |
| For work (learn news in the system of education of the KR) | 42.0 | 25.1 | 18.8 | 11.1 | 2.9 |
| For self-education | 55.1 | 18.8 | 19.8 | 4.8 | 1.4 |
| For entertainment | 13.0 | 14.0 | 14.5 | 30.4 | 28.0 |
| Awareness of the problem of extremism and counteraction to it | 6.8 | 9.7 | 14.0 | 28.0 | 41.5 |
| Other |  |  |  |  |  |

**Assessment and evaluation of information**

Once media consumption habits and most common information channels are identified, it is important to assess the ability of teachers to critically analyse and evaluate information, media content, the work and functions of media and information institutions. This includes their ability to compare facts, distinguish facts from opinion, be aware of timing (new/news/obsolete), identify underlying ideologies and values, and questioning how social, economic, political, professional, and technological forces shape media and information content.

Out of the total number of the respondents, 72.5% reported to cross check information in other sources. On the one hand, this is a positive result indicating critical assessment of the information. On the other, the results of this questionnaire reflect the respondents’ self-esteem, which point to the tendency among the respondents to overestimate themselves. The pattern of overrating abilities is a global phenomenon and the reasons for this overinflation of competences can vary from ignorance to a number of cultural, social and individual motives[[11]](#footnote-11). If we try to contextualize the assessment, the self-inflation can be considered to be more of a generational phenomenon.

The survey drilled down further to understand whether an information channel or a category of information can change the respondents’ decision about cross checking information. For this purpose the survey asked respondents an additional set of questions on how often they cross check information related to health, work and security situation in the country (emergency situations, conflicts, extremism, etc), which is received via messengers, on social media, via traditional and new media as well as via friends or colleagues.

Table 7 shows that in the overwhelming majority of cases, the respondents reported always verifying work-related information and occasionally verify information related to health and security situation in the country. Almost equal amount of respondents cross check information on security situation in the country always, occasionally or do not verify at all. Noticeably, this makes the percent of those whose who do not verify information on security much higher as compared to information on health and work. This behavior pattern does not change across all information channels and is particularly higher when the information is broadcasted on television.

In the meanwhile, the respondents believe that the information received via television and radio is more trustworthy as compared to other information channels. This finding is also confirmed by an earlier research on the assessment of the media literacy level in Kyrgyzstan, which showed that people believe TV footage cannot be faked and therefore have a higher level of trust in the broadcast TV programmes[[12]](#footnote-12). The percent of those who cross check information broadcasted on radio is the smallest. Taking into account that the amount of respondents, who either have or listen to the radio, is very minimum, this information source should not be used to reach out to a large audience. Interestingly, the respondents in all age groups cross check information received via WhatsApp and social media channels. In this particular category, the respondents verify information occasionally or always.

**Table 7**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Source of information** | **Info on health** | **Info related to work** | **Info related to the security in the country (emergency situations, extremism, etc.)** |
| always | occasionally | never | always | occasionally | never | always | occasionally | never |
| WhatsApp | 28.5 | 31.4 | 12.6 | 42.5 | 23.2 | 6.8 | 24.6 | 27.5 | 20.3 |
| Friends/ colleagues/ acquaintances | 17.9 | 43.5 | 11.1 | 33.3 | 32.4 | 6.8 | 17.9 | 32.9 | 21.7 |
| Social media | 24.6 | 36.7 | 11.1 | 26.6 | 37.2 | 8.7 | 22.7 | 27.1 | 22.7 |
| TV | 16.9 | 35.7 | 19.8 | 22.2 | 30.9 | 19.3 | 19.3 | 22.7 | 30.4 |
| Other mass media  | 21.3 | 31.4 | 19.8 | 21.7 | 37.2 | 13.5 | 16.4 | 31.4 | 24.6 |
| Radio | 9.7 | 32.9 | 30.0 | 16.4 | 29.0 | 27.1 | 12.6 | 26.6 | 33.3 |
| Internet (other sources except listed above) | 20.8 | 32.9 | 18.8 | 24.6 | 30.0 | 17.9 | 18.4 | 28.0 | 26.1 |

The data disaggregated by area shows that respondents from Karakol, Naryn and Batken more often than their peers from other areas cross check information. At the same time, respondents in Bishkek and Osh demonstrate less willingness to cross check, except for work-related information.

To further assess critical attitude towards information among the teachers, the survey offered the respondents to explain how they share certain categories of information in social networks or messengers. Overall, the respondents reported to have a high level of responsibility in sharing information. For example, in the overwhelming majority of cases - 54.6% and 45.4% respectively - the respondents informed that they share information related to health and work only if they trust the source. In case the source of information about work is not reliable, the respondents double-check the facts (24.6%). In case the respondents come across information related to security situation, similarly equal percent of respondents would share only if they trust the source (30.9%), not share at all (30%) or double check the data prior to sharing (27.5%). When it comes to information on socio-political topics, the majority of respondents chose not to share the information at all (83%) or share in case they trust the source (67%). At the same time, the respondents were more willing to share information related to charity and announcements about search for people. The survey showed that young people from the age group between 22 and 31 happen to share information right away. As for the differences between male and female respondents, the percent of those who share information only after double checking the data and confirming its veracity is higher among male respondents, while female respondents tend to share more often without thinking or not sharing at all.

*The results provided in the three above subsections show that teachers receive information through a wide variety of sources. They also cross check different types of information to ensure its accuracy. Overall, teachers have the ability “to critically evaluate information and its sources and to incorporate selected information for problem-solving and analysis of ideas.” This skils is an essential criteria of Competency 4 “Critically Evaluating Information and Information Sources”. A firm ability to cross check information may indicate that teachers can analyze how the rules and expectations governing media genres can be manipulated for particular effects or purposes. This implies the teachers can demonstrate some elements of the Competency 6 “Situating the Sociocultural Context of Media Content”. The fact that teachers do look for certain types of information (related to work, health and emergency situation) and use a variety of sources shows that the teachers can select efficient and effective approaches for accessing information they require for investigative or information retrieval purposes. This ability forms an essential part of Competency 3 “Accessing Information Effectively and Efficiently”[[13]](#footnote-13). Abilities outlined by teachers demonstrate rather high level of critical approach towards information with the only reservation that these results are based on the self-assessment, which means some of the competencies claimed by teachers can be overrated. It is recommended to additionally test cross checking skills of teachers before drawing a final conclusion.*

**Understanding the functioning of mass media**

Understanding the nature, functions and operations of media institutions, media professionals and information providers is an important part of media literacy. It is crucial for knowing how to deconstruct information and media messages, how to differentiate between objective and doctored media content. It also helps to understand the role of the media and information in the broader context, particularly for promoting freedom of expression, freedom of information and access to information.

To this end, 84.5% of the respondents believe mass media should be independent. The belief is shared almost equally by female and male respondents. Disaggregated by age and area the data shows that the remaining 15.5% represent overwhelmingly two age groups - between 22 and 31 as well as 52 and older - and reside mostly in Osh and Batken. The survey has also revealed that 70.5% consider that mass media is solely responsible for dissemination of information; this belief gained slightly more support among male respondents. This result indicates that respondents are not aware of their responsibilities related to the dissemination of information.

According to Table 8 teachers rated themselves highly confident about being able to say when an ad is embedded in a text or a video product. At the same time, levels of confidence slightly drop to midrange when the respondents need to tell paid and non-paid content when an ad tag is absent. A similar situation is observed in the next pair of questions. Respondents seem to be more aware about ethical norms rather than laws media should comply with. Noteable, male respondents demonstrated a slightly higher level of confidence about the laws and ethical principles regulating mass media. This perhaps means that the teachers need to deepen their knowledge of how media functions and which laws it follows.

**Table 8**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Skills | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| You realize when there is an advertisement in a text / video / post, even if it is hidden | 40.1  | 39.6 | 9.7 | 3.9 | 6.8 |
| You know how to distinguish PR materials from informative ones, if it is not indicated that this is PR material? | 29.0  | 28.5 | 23.2 | 3.9 | 15.5 |
| You understand when information in the media meets or does not comply with ethical norms and standards | 49.8  | 28.0 | 10.6 | 3.4 | 8.2 |
| You understand when media information violates or contradicts laws | 39.1 | 32.9 | 15.9 | 1.9 | 10.1 |

Asked about what norms should media adhere to, respondents’ answers split between three categories: laws (41.1%), professional ethics (34.3%) and interests of the state (20.3%). The respondents stated that the media content is influenced by owners, advertisers, readers as well as personal believes.

During the workshop, the teachers developed an additional block of questions, which will help to understand whether teachers question nature of information and whether they can differentiate between different agendas each type of information pursues. When sharing information, the majority of respondents reported to pay attention to certain details such as purpose (promotion or awareness raising) (78.7%), date (71.5%), author (74.9%), and the source (83.1%). The categories of answers were included in the question. The popularity of the information as well as the language is on the radar of a smaller percent of respondents - 46.9% and 50.7% respectively. 68.1% of respondents assess whether the information provided is complete. In terms of age, younger teachers are less likely to pay attention to the author of the information and notice more often popularity as compared to the age group 52 and older. These questions offered teachers to rate themselves, which is why the results can be inflated. These results should be cross checked in focus groups with practical tests.

Furthermore, in an age of information overload, individuals need also to master the technical skills of organizing, selecting and synthesizing media and information. Slightly more than half of the respondents save information, which they may find useful in the future. Those who do so usually use memory sticks or print copies of the information. If the information collected is not sufficient, 46.0% of respondents will search for more details on the Internet, while 24.3% will turn to friends or colleagues for clarification. The third most popular source of additional information is social media platforms. The latter is particularly popular among age group between 22 and 31. These patterns of behaviour are the same across area, age and gender groups. The results of this question show that the respondents use a variety of methods of searching for information.

*This chapter and its subsections provide an important and large bulk of information necessary to assess UNESCO competences for teachers. The chapter shows that overall, teachers possess certain set of skills, which will allow them to a certain extent critically evaluate information and information sources - Competency 4 “[[14]](#footnote-14). Thus, the teachers reported to use a variety of criteria to evaluate informational media (date, author, etc) as well as determine probable accuracy by questioning the source of data. At the same time, they do not pay much attention to the popularity of information offered on social media, which actually is an important indicator. According to some research, recommendation systems on social media platforms traditionally emphasized popularity, which implies some of the top videos retrieved at request can be false because they might have been promoted by bots[[15]](#footnote-15). Additionally, not all teachers can recognize prejudice, deception, or manipulation, especially when they deal with paid content without an ad-tag. While the overwhelming majority of respondents believe mass media should be independent, a slightly smaller group considers that mass media is solely responsible for dissemination of information. Additionally, this chapter revealed that teachers have little knowledge of the laws and ethical norms, which regulate functioning of mass media. This result indicates that the teachers need to improve their understanding of the functions of the media and the relationships among citizens and media content. Both of these skills are reflected in the Competency 1 “Understanding the Role of Media and Information in Democracy” and Competency 2 “Understanding Media Content and Its Uses”[[16]](#footnote-16).*

**D. CREATION OF CONTENT**

The ability of teachers to produce media and information content in a responsible and ethical manner is a key element in media literacy. It allows communicating with others and participating in social and public activities as an active citizen. Understanding how well teachers can produce information and knowledge will inform further capacity-building interventions and policy-making.

Table 9 shows that the respondents are more experienced in online communications as compared to offline discussions, unless these are work-related meetings. The overall responses provided indicate at a low level of technical savviness of the respondents in dealing with photo or video materials. In terms of gender, male respondents reported to be more active in contacting media and expressing their opinions in social media as compared to female respondents.

**Table 9**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Yes | No |
| Express collective opinion at the meeting (colleagues / neighbors / communities) | 87.9 | 12.1 |
| Contact the media: write a letter to a newspaper or online publication, contact TV or radio journalists | 39.1 | 60.9 |
| Organize press-conference | 28.5 | 71.5 |
| To speak at a press conference | 43.0 | 57.0 |
| To write a post in social network | 60.9 | 39.1 |
| Disseminate via messengers (WatsApp, etc.) | 62.3 | 37.7 |
| Create photo or video material | 44.9 | 55.1 |

The respondents were also asked to rate their skills of content creation. Table 10 shows that they rated themselves highly confident when collecting information about one event from a variety of sources and in different formats. This means the respondents are capable of putting together a comprehensive and a full overview of developments and most likely can impart their skills on students. Levels of confidence slightly dropped when the respondents were asked to assess their knowledge of international standards and ethical principles related to the creation of content; the least confident is the age group between 22 and 31 years old. A similar situation is observed when accurate and clear content needs to be created. The respondents demonstrated the lowest level of confidence about specific types of content (text, video, photo) which fit different channels or platforms (Youtube, Instagram, Facebook, etc). The least confident are the age groups between 22 and 31 and 52 and older. The responses of male and female teachers did not reveal significant differences.

**Table 10**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Skills | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| Ability to collect and analyze information about the same event or the same trend, but from different formats, for example, from (photos, videos, texts and info-graphics? | 37.2 | 39.1 | 13.0 | 4.3 | 6.3 |
| Knowledge and application of international standards and ethical standards in creating content | 23.2 | 31.9 | 28.0 | 5.3 | 11.6 |
| Creating understandable content so that your thoughts are formulated in a way to clearly and accurately convey them to the audience | 31.4 | 32.4 | 20.8 | 7.7 | 7.7 |
| Understanding and knowing which content is suitable for different resources | 28.0 | 28.5 | 24.6 | 7.2 | 11.6 |

The survey showed that an average of 30% of teachers use online applications and/or computer programmes to create content online. Age groups 42-51 and 52 and older use twice less often programmes and applications for editing photos and videos. The types of preferred programs and applications differ among age groups. For example, the most popular photo editing program reported by the respondents is PowerPoint Presentation; while more technical programmes like Photoshop and and Coreldraw are the second choice for the age groups 22-31 and 42-51 respectively. The most widely used video editing programme is VivaVideo. The responses of male and female teachers did not reveal significant differences.

Over 70% of respondents rated their level of media literacy as confident, while 21.7% admitted they have a basic level. Only marginal group of the respondents ranked their level of media literacy as advanced. The largest group of those who are ready to teach media literacy is among the age group between 31 and 42 years old.

*An analysis of these answers shows that teachers do not possess all the skills required for MIL Competency 5 “Applying New and Traditional Media Formats”. For example, they have a rather limited understanding of the basics of digital technology, communication tools and networks, and their usage in different contexts for different purposes. The teachers likewise do not widely use online space and other forms of media or platforms to express their ideas. The lower level of confidence about knowledge of international standards and ethical principles of content creation shows there is a need to improve understanding of media and information ethics among the teachers.*

*This offers another evidence that there is room for improvement in relation to the Competency 1 “Understanding the Role of Media and Information in Democracy”.*

**E. COUNTERACTING EXTREMISM THROUGH MEDIA AND INFORMATION LITERACY**

Over the past decade, violent extremism and terrorism have become a major global security concern, including in Kyrgyzstan. Different research indicate that local youth continue to be the preferred demographic for recruiters in the region to pick from, while social media are one of the recruiters’ preferred tools. Better understanding of the use and potential of the internet in spreading online violent extremism in Kyrgyzstan among the teachers can make an important contribution to the prevention of this phenomena. The survey sought to assess the overall level of awareness among teachers about the phenomenon of extremism in Kyrgyzstan and their knowledge about the tools, which can be used to prevent the spread of violence.

The results of the survey shows that 47.8% of respondents claimed to know which information disseminated in media and/or in the Internet can be attributed to extremist activities. The least informed out of this 47.8% is the age group 21-32; only 28.3% provided a positive response. The respondents were further asked to give examples of information, which can be considered extremist. This was an open ended question. The respondents provided a wide variety of answers captured in Table 11, which indicate at different levels of awareness and knowledge. The responses of male and female teachers did not reveal significant differences.

**Table 11**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Examples of information, which can be qualified as “extremist”** | **Percent of respondents**  |
| Audio and video material calling for riots  | 13.0% |
| Mass circulation and propaganda of religious ideas (calls for jihad, leaflets, books)  | 8.2% |
| Information related to terrorism (foreign fighters, war, terrorist acts, etc)  | 7.2% |
| Information which can lead to an interethnic conflict | 6.3% |
| Calls to seize the powers  | 3.9% |
| Aggression, violence, a societal divide | 3.4% |
| Do not know | 2.9% |
| Information which undermines state security | 2.4% |
| Chauvinism | 0.5% |

Disaggregated by age data shows that compared to others, the age group 22-31 has the least percent of responses, which attribute propaganda of religious ideas as an extremist activity. The same age group gave the largest percent of “do not know” answers and was mostly registered in Batken and Naryn. On the contrary, teachers from Osh and Jalal-Abad most often think that “propaganda of religious ideas” and “information, which can lead to interethnic conflicts” fall under the category of extremist activity. Perhaps this is due to the fact that these areas experienced an interethnic conflict in 2010. The same answers were least frequent in Bishkek and Batken.

The survey also sought to assess the level of awareness about legal responsibility for extremist activity among the teachers[[17]](#footnote-17). Table 12 shows that out of 47.8% of respondents, who claimed to know which information disseminated in media and/or in the Internet can be attributed to extremist activities, the majority are confident that storing and disseminating hardcopies of extremist materials causes legal responsibility. The level of confidence slightly dropped when the same activities takes place online. Perhaps the first two answers sound familiar to the respondents as they can be often found in media crime reports. Likewise, in the previous question, the age group 22-31 offered the least percent of accurate answers. The responses of male and female teachers did not reveal significant differences.

**Table 12**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Kyrgyz laws prescribe legal responsibility for: | Percent of respondents |
| Storing of materials considered as extremist in hardcopy (brochures, books, leaflets, etc.) | 42.5% |
| Disseminating of materials classified as extremist, in hardcopy form (brochures, books, leaflets, etc.) | 42.5% |
| Storing materials classified as extremist on electronic media (mobile phone, PC) | 37.2% |
| Publishing materials classified as extremist in social networks on your own page | 36.2% |
| Distributing materials classified as extremist through instant messengers, for example, social networks; | 31.9% |
| Orally retelling content of materials classified as extremist | 24.2% |

The results of the survey showed that respondents believe that social media and messengers and are top channels used by the supporters of extremist ideas to disseminate their ideas and recruit young people in Kyrgyzstan. Third largest group of respondents believe that acquaintances can also be a source of extremist ideas. The other channels are considered to be less effective and include relatives and friends, davatchi and leaflets. Disaggregated by age data shows that the age group 22-31 dismissed acquaintances as least effective and included leaflets in the category of rather effective sources of disseminating extremist ideas and recruiting young people.

Table 13 illustrates a list of measures, which the same 47.8% believe are effective in counteracting the spread of extremist ideas. Although educational activities are included in the top three answers, almost all other responses suggest restrictive legal measures. Noticeably, a rather big percent of respondents did not have any suggestions at all. The majority of responses in this category were provided by female teachers. Female respondents also contributed more to the answers in the category “Workshops, training sessions, round tables for all, including youth” (19% - female teachers vs 13.3% male teachers), while an overwhelming majority of answers “Strengthen or adopt new laws” were offered by male teachers (9.5% - female teachers vs 20.5% male teachers).

**Table 13**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Effective measures to counter extremism**  | **Percent of respondents** |
| State control over mass media, Internet and social media  | 10.6 |
| Do not have an answer | 10.1 |
| Workshops, training sessions, round tables for all, including youth | 8.7 |
| Criminal responsibility for the individuals disseminating extremist information  | 6.3 |
| Strengthen or adopt new laws  | 5.3 |
| Raise the level of spirituality among the population | 2.4 |
| Ban and block in social media and Internet those, who disseminate extremist information  | 3.4 |
| No need to do anything | 1.0 |

*Evidence shows that less than 50% of teachers claimed to know which information disseminated in media and/or in the Internet can be attributed to extremist activities. The most important conclusion provided by this section is that teachers are not well familiar with the functions of media and other information providers and understand their importance to citizenship and informed decision-making. In order to fully realize Competency 1 “Understanding the Role of Media and Information in Democracy”, teachers need to improve their understanding of key concepts such as freedom of expression, access to information and fundamental rights enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Likewise, teachers need to improve their knowledge of such concepts as media pluralism, editorial independence as well as media and information ethics, and be able to identify when these have been breached.*

**CONCLUSIONS**

This report offers an assessment of contextual information for MIL in Kyrgyzstan. The outcomes of this report can be further used for evidence-based policy and decision-making in planning, developing and implementing national policies and strategies on media and information literacy, and ICT in education.

Throughout the report, evidence suggests media/ICT availability in universities and in households with a few exceptions. There is a gap between rural and urban areas in terms of equipment availability both in universities and in households. The respondents also confirmed rather high level of Internet connectivity both at universities and in households. Overall, access to the Internet is more common via mobile internet providers. Teachers in rural areas reported to have higher rate of limited Internet connection as compared to urban areas. Despite a relatively high level of the availability of the Internet at universities, the survey did not ask whether the respondents actually use the Internet either during classes or in order to prepare for the classes. To get a more clear picture, it is recommended to ask about the actual use in the future surveys.

Mobile devices are commonly available and are used by teachers in education. Nevertheless, a self-assessment exercise showed that teachers feel less confident using online services, such as e-government or online payments. This may imply that while teachers do use mobile devices for surfing the Internet and looking for information, they cannot utilize full potential of digital technologies available online. This may be an area where some formal training is required.

The analysed sample of university teachers demonstrates that they are not “digital natives” and took courses to obtain computer literacy skills. While teachers can cope with basic offline tasks, they however feel less confident dealing with more complex programs like Excel or PowerPoint presentations. This is another area which requires further improvement. Taking into account that the survey asked the teachers to provide self-assessment, it is important to recall that the respondents always tend to overestimate themselves. No practical tests were conducted to either confirm or disprove this self-assessment.

Similarly, content creation is a weakness for age groups 42-51 and 52 and older both technologically and ethically. This age group feels rather uncomfortable creating new content and therefore will not be able to impart their knowledge to the students.

The survey showed that teachers get information from a variety of sources, however, preferences vary between different age groups. Social media as information channels are more popular among the age group 22 to 41, while 42 to 52 and older rated this medium as the second most popular option after television. Teachers have also reported to have a rather high level of critical analysis of media and information content. The research confirmed that teachers cross check information of personal importance and take on a responsible approach when sharing or reposting information. At the same time, the fact that teachers verify health-related information occasionally may indicate to a lower level critical assessment as compared to the reported level of self-assessment. Research shows that the majority of fakes online are related to health, therefore, respondents should be much more careful about trusting health-related articles.

The majority of teachers reported that mass media should be independent at the same time a certain percentage stated that media should be guided by the state interests. These are two extreme positions, which pinpoint to the possible lack of clear understanding of the nature and principles of functioning of the mass media. On the one hand, the Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights foresees restrictions to the right to freedom of opinion for the sake of protecting national security or public order, which are state interests. From this point of view the answers offered by the respondents are in line with the international norms and regulations. On the other hand, Siracusa Principle warns against systematic violation of human rights, which may undermine true national security and may jeopardize international peace and security. In order to be able to advise students on the best ways to address threats such as extremism, teachers need to enhance their understanding of the laws regulating freedom of the media and expression.

While more than 70% of teachers claimed to be able to spot cases when media violates ethical standards, more than 50% of teachers were not able to say which ethical norms should be applied when they create media or information content online. As a matter of practice, the online space is viewed as a grey zone where rights and responsibilities get blurred. Clearly, there is a need to improve understanding among the teachers about the role of the media and information in the broader context, particularly for promoting freedom of expression, freedom of information and access to information online as well as responsibilities which come together with this right. This knowledge will enable them to understand the functions of media and other information providers to critically evaluate content and make informed decisions as users and producers of content.

Overall, the teachers have an intermediate level of MIL. They have a good level of knowledge and skills acquired from practice on MIL, but there are gaps in certain areas:

* Although, the teachers can create and produce new information, media content or knowledge for a specific purpose in an innovative manner, they find it difficult to use appropriate channels and tools in an ethical, legal and effective manner.
* The level of participation in societal-public activities as active citizens requires improvement. While teachers are ready to comment online, they are not willing to be active citizens in the offline space.
* Evaluate and authenticate information and media content gathered and its sources and media and information providers in society, teachers require additional training to understand the necessity of media and information providers in society. They also need further improvements in evaluating media and information providers in society.
* Capacity-building on skills where teachers self-rated their confidence as mid- to low-level should be prioritised.

The last area of inquiry in this study revolved around the understanding of the extremism phenomenon in the local context. The most important finding from the evidence is that less than 50% of teachers claimed to know which information disseminated in media and/or in the Internet can be attributed to extremist activities. This is a relatively small number which needs to be taken into account by policy makers. The teachers need to improve their understanding of the violent extremism and related phenomena prior to imparting their knowledge to their students. Among those who claimed to know what extremism activities are, very few have a clearer understanding of different concepts such as extremism, terrorism, radicalization. Currently, they are used by teachers interchangeably. It is worth noting that association of various religious terms with extremism indicates at a low level of awareness about the phenomenon of extremism. A formal training course is required on different phenomena, their manifestations and legal responsibilities for these activities. Teachers also require introduction to the basics of religious knowledge. There is a particularly big gap in this sphere among representatives of the age group 22-31. The survey highlighted differences in understanding of extremism in different geographic areas. It may be useful to have mixed group of teachers if any formal training course is organized. Sharing of experience and views between peers may be an added value of such a course.

The survey showed also that teachers have limited interest in the news related to extremism and rarely cross check this type of information. Perhaps this is due to the fact that teachers learn about such information from news bulletins broadcast on TV, which remains one of the most reliable sources of information for the teachers. Additionally, state bodies tend to be the main source of such information, which most likely leaves no reasons for questioning the veracity of the information related to extremism, emergency situations, etc.

Finally, the survey has demonstrated that teachers believe that greater state control over the Internet is an effective method of preventing extremism. Different research suggests that filtering and blocking sites only leads to the transition of extremists from social networks to closed channels where they are difficult to track[[18]](#footnote-18). Therefore, the most effective approach is education that decreases susceptibility to propaganda of any kind. The teachers require informal training in educational methods which promote respect for human rights and diversity, and promote peaceful coexistence and tolerance as indicated in the UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism[[19]](#footnote-19).

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

*Summarize the competencies that need to be reinforced*

The evidence provided in the report, shows that the teachers need to reinforce several areas of knowledge and skills to obtain competencies required for teaching MIL.

Under Competency 1 “Understanding the Role of Media and Information in Democracy” teachers need to strengthen their knowledge of:

* key concepts such as freedom of expression, access to information and fundamental rights;
* media pluralism, media and other information providers as platforms for intercultural dialogue and why these are important;
* editorial independence as well as media and information ethics.

*How the competencies can be reinforced*

*Where the competencies should be reinforced*

*Who should take responsibility*

*And finally the conditions that are necessary in order to advance these competencies.*

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