Transdiciplinary and multimodal approach to the integration of media education into the content of higher education in Slovakia

Enfoque transdiciplinar y multimodal de la integración de la educación mediática en los contenidos de la enseñanza superior en Eslovaquia

Abordagem transdiciplinar e multimodal para a integração da educação midiática no conteúdo do ensino superior na Eslováquia

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The aim of this study is to identify and demonstrate transdisciplinarity and multimodality in the integration of media education into the content of higher education in Slovakia. The starting point is a systematic quantitative and qualitative analysis of the 305 study plans of the selected programmes at the ten largest Slovak universities. The results highlight the breadth of disciplines of study as well as the multiplicity of modalities for explicitly integrating media education into the curriculum under study.

KEYWORDS: Media education, transdisciplinarity, multimodality, university.

El objetivo de este estudio es identificar y demostrar la transdisciplinariedad y la multimodalidad en la integración de la educación mediática en el contenido de la educación superior en Eslovaquia. El punto de partida es un análisis de contenido cuantitativo y cualitativo sistemático de los 305 planes de estudio de los programas seleccionados de las diez mayores universidades eslovacas. Los resultados demuestran la amplitud de las disciplinas de estudio, así como los modelos de multiplicación de las modalidades de integración explícita de la educación mediática en el currículo estudiado.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Educación mediática, transdisciplinariedad, multimodalidad, universidad.

O objetivo deste estudo é identificar e demonstrar a transdisciplinaridade e a multimodalidade na integração da educação midiática ao conteúdo do ensino superior na Eslováquia. O ponto de partida é uma análise sistemática de conteúdo quantitativo e qualitativo de 305 currículos de programas selecionados entre as dez maiores universidades eslovacas. Os resultados demonstram a amplitude das disciplinas de estudo, bem como os padrões de multiplicação das modalidades de integração explícita da educação midiática no currículo estudado.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Educação midiática, transdisciplinaridade, multimodalidade, universidade.

INTRODUCTION

The need for a more comprehensive literacy and personal training of the individual, with respect to the reality of the different media modalities (transmedia) and the forms of their interaction with the media, have prompted new academic reflections, which are associated with the concept of media education as a multidimensional construct. This can be considered relevant precisely in relation to the pursued objective of media education, i.e. the achievement of a complete qualification in working with the media, which includes knowledge, skills, and attitudes in relation to a broad spectrum of media reality, but also a more complex personal qualification. Examples are the concept of multidimensional transmedia literacy (Scolari, 2018), or the concept of media and information literacy (MIL) conceived as transliteracy, or multimodal (trans)media literacy in the context of the MILX (Media and Information Literacy Expansion) cumulative transcompetence model (Grizzle & Hamada, 2019), which extends the original MIL concept to include social, emotional, civic, intercultural and interreligious competencies. Likewise, the concept of media competence ''augmented'' to personal, cultural, social and civic competence is exemplary from the perspective of the need for a holistic framework for the formation of a person (Kačinová & Sádaba-Chalezquer, 2022).

The concept of media education as a multidimensional construct is also reflected in its broader curricular anchoring in school education. For example, it is compulsory in Slovak primary and secondary schools, and is integrated with some flexibility (Gálik et al., 2024; Vrabec, 2014), while observing the application of a cross-curricular approach. This is the predominant model of its inclusion in teaching content, similar to many other countries (Kačinová, 2018; Rojas-Estrada et al., 2024). From their perspective it is introduced transversally in a wide range of multiple teaching subjects.

As there is an increasing urgency to design appropriate learning environments that promote media literacy in a more integrated university education (Sedelmaier et al., 2022), there seems to be a natural demand to also apply the above-mentioned approach of its integration into the university curriculum.

Within the framework, it can be affirmed that media education is a phenomenon on which several different disciplines are inevitably focused, while, as far as its transversal inclusion is concerned, it is a transdisciplinary object of scientific study. Transdisciplinarity in the approach not only to media education research, but also to its very scope in the context of its integration into the university curriculum, is underlined by the multilayered nature of the digital media phenomenon itself as an object of study. This can only be adequately addressed through a "higher level of integration among fields and disciplines, working together to develop new theories, concepts, methods and applications around common problems", moving "this process towards transdisciplinarity" (Langton et al., 2019, p. 499).

Due to the key cross-cutting nature of the topic, international approaches especially advocate for greater integration of media education or aspects of media competence in university curricula that prepare education as well as communication professionals. The starting point here is the current evaluation of national curricular policies, as well as of the teaching practices of faculties dedicated to the training of communication professionals (journalism, audiovisual communication, advertising) and of faculties dedicated to the training of education professionals (pedagogy, psychopedagogy, social educators and infant and primary teachers) in relation to the topic of media competence of citizenship, which is connected with the need to evaluate the study plans to ascertain the presence or absence of content linked to it (De Pablos Pons & Ballesta Pagán, 2018).

In general, it can be stated that the exploration of curricular content, as well as the forms and policies of curricular integration of media education or its outcomes in international contexts, has been the subject of academic research for a long time (Fedorov et al., 2016; Rojas-Estrada et al., 2024). In our research, we focus on a systematic and comprehensive analysis of the curricula of the educational programs of the largest Slovak universities related to media education, with the intention of demonstrating transdisciplinarity in their integration into the content of higher education in Slovakia.

This means demonstrating that the integration of media education into the study plan goes beyond a disciplinary approach and allows for

the participation or synergy of multiple disciplines, as noted above. The focus is on the identification of explicit content, specifically subjects oriented to it. At the same time, the detection of its multimodality in its integration into the curriculum of higher education in Slovakia is also an important point of our study. Exploring the international practice of universities, especially in Germanic countries where it is particularly developed (Barg, 2024; Online Akademie, n.d.; Universität Wien, 2024), several focal modes of integration of media education or its results in the curriculum are offered for this identification:

1. A stand-alone or combined undergraduate or bachelor's degree and master's degree program focused on media education or related fields.
2. The definition of media education or pedagogy as a specialization of study, focus and module within selected programs of study.
3. Subject within selected programs of study.
4. Integrated content of curricula.
5. "Extension" or complementary study within existing teacher education programs and as an additional qualification for practicing teachers.
6. Continuing education courses in media education offered in conjunction with the studies, but also for practicing teachers.

At the same time, other forms of integration within these categories clearly exist, but have not yet been sufficiently explored.

Methodology

With respect to the essence of media education and its outcomes, our research focuses on addressing the following questions:

1. What is the nature of the transdisciplinary scope of media education in its integration into the content of higher education in Slovakia?
2. How does the multimodal approach apply to the integration of media education into the content of higher education in Slovakia?

We will focus on demonstrating the extent and modes of transversality of explicit integration of media education in university fields and programs as a subject (compulsory, compulsory elective, optional). At the same time, we will indicate the scope of media education in related subjects, i.e., its extension in university content (RQ1). Multimodality in the approach to its inclusion in the curriculum will be inferred by observing the modes of teaching in accordance with the above, with emphasis on identifying the ways of teaching it as its own content and its multiplication (combination) in key Slovak universities (actors) (RQ2).

Within the framework of the mixed research strategy, the main methodological tool to investigate the problem was a quantitative and qualitative content analysis of plans of study of fields and university bachelor's and master's degree programs transversally related to media education in Slovakia, during the school year 2023/2024, and sporadically also 2022/2023. They include Teaching and Pedagogical Sciences, Media and Communication Studies, and also Informatics, Psychology, Aesthetics, Ethics, Theology, Arts and Cultural Sciences, Sociology, History and Philology.

The sample consisted of 305 plans of study from the nine largest Slovak public universities and one private university in the geographically relevant areas of Slovakia, especially faculties offering the abovementioned programs. These were faculties of Arts, Education, Social Sciences, Mass Media, Natural Sciences, Mathematics, Physics and Informatics, Theology or similar. At the same time, the research sample included study programs at three levels of study, specifically focused on media education. The nature of the selection corresponds to that of the sample (Kačinová, 2017) with the possibility of comparing the results.

The selection of teacher programs was conditioned by the integration of media education in the subjects of general education in Slovakia (Kačinová, 2018). The sample size consisted of all those programs identified, which highlights the representativeness of the results obtained. The units of content analysis were keywords and their combinations or variations: "media", "education", "media education", "media literacy", "media and information literacy", "media competence". They were established with the intention of identifying the programs, subjects, or educational content in the designation explicitly and fully correlated

with the research topic (media education, its basic outcomes) and its various modalities.

To understand the nature of the subjects identified, as well as the integration of media education in other related subjects, the selected information sheets were also analyzed qualitatively. The basis of the analysis consisted of publicly available sources: information and documentation on university websites or publicly available academic information systems (databases). In some cases, the relevant academic staff of the universities were consulted directly. The data identified were grouped by focus categories: fields of study and faculty and university programs, and were evaluated and interpreted quantitatively. Within the qualitative approach applied through content analysis, a descriptive-explanatory procedure was used by integrating the findings (identified units) into the context or environment (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992) of the studied Slovak educational system. In the case of exploring the modalities of integrating media education into the university curriculum, we capture the essential modalities through models seeking to represent them explicitly (Bielik et al., 2016).

Results

The analysis of study plans and educational offerings of Slovak universities shows the explicit implementation of media education as a subject in 38 core programs within four different fields of study. At the same time, their number has increased in certain teacher education programs, where the core program is combined with others. In one case, a broad transdisciplinary approach has been adopted in which it has been established for all faculty programs as a compulsory subject[3] (Figure 1).

The following are the ways in which media education is integrated as a subject in the study plans:

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[3]   The study follows in its results those of Kačinová (2024).

FIGURE 1

INTEGRATION OF MEDIA EDUCATION AS A SUBJECT IN THE SPECTRUM
OF FIELDS OF STUDY AND PROGRAMS OF STUDY IN SLOVAKIA
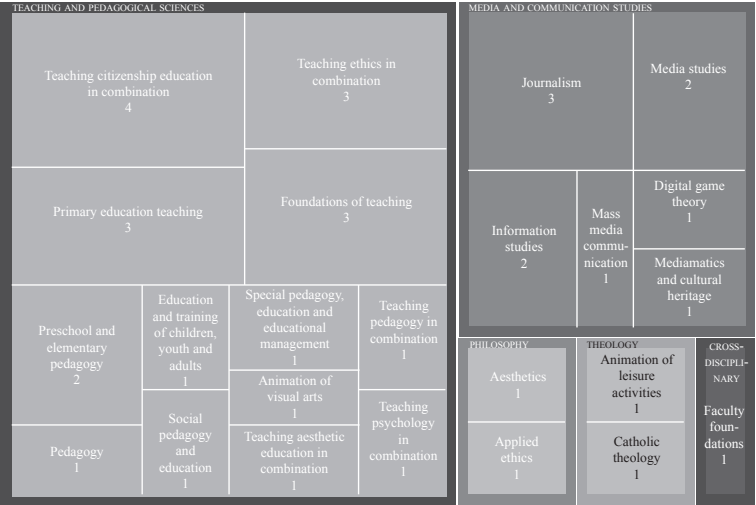
Source: The authors.

a. Within a single study program: here, programs focused on Teaching
    and Pedagogical Sciences, as well as Media and Communication
    Studies, predominate. In addition, the subject is taught as part of
    the disciplines of Philosophy (Aesthetics, Applied Ethics - Ethical
    Expertise and Ethical Counseling) and Theology (Animation of
    Leisure Activities and Catholic Theology).

b. In the framework of a double combination of study programs: this
    approach is valid for so-called Teacher Education Programs. In the
    education system of Slovakia, certain programs of this type can
    only be studied in combination with other programs focused on
    other teaching subjects in primary and secondary schools. They
    also share common study plans depending on the main subject. For
    example, the Faculty of Arts of the Pavol Jozef Šafárik University
    in Košice offered the program Teaching Ethics (in combination),

which included the compulsory elective subject "Media Education" at the master's level in seven teacher education programs combined with this program (Citizenship Education, Psychology, History, German Language and Literature, Slovak Language and Literature, Latin Language and Literature, and Geography) (Univerzita P. J. Šafárika v Košiciach, 2023/24).

c. Within a common group of study programs: this is the inclusion of media education as a subject in the so-called Foundations of Teaching or Pedagogical, Psychological and Social Science Foundations of Teaching and similar. This means that the subject must be taken at the appropriate level by students in all or selected teaching programs. For example, the Faculty of Education of Trnava University offered the compulsory elective subject "Reading and Media Literacy" in the second year of the bachelor's degree, as part of the program "Foundations of Teaching", which was part of 59 programs preparing teachers for primary and secondary schools, including the subjects Chemistry and Biology (Pedagogická fakulta TU v Trnava, 2023/2024). Thus, a multi-programmatic scope is achieved. In the study of Teaching Pedagogy (in combination) and Psychology (in combination), it was offered as part of the Pedagogical-Psychological and Socio-Scientific Foundations on a compulsory or optional compulsory basis at the bachelor's level by the Faculty of Education of Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra (Univerzita Konštantína Filozofa v Nitre, 2023/2024).

d. Within all programs of study of the faculty: in this case it is the integration of the subject of Media Education in the offer of the program called "Faculty Foundations", which is taken by students of all programs of study, thus affecting a wide range of disciplines. An example of this is the Faculty of Arts and Letters, Catholic University in Ružomberok, which has introduced the compulsory subject "Faculty Seminar 2 - Media Literacy and Digital Technologies" for students in the first year of the bachelor's degree for all single-discipline study programs, interdisciplinary (non-Teaching) and teaching programs (two study programs combined) (Katolícka univerzita v Ružomberku, n.d.).

The nature of transdisciplinary relations and (multi)modalities of media education in the content of higher education in Slovakia can also be deduced from the subject designations in the context of the integrated program of studies, which implies its basic orientation. In addition to the traditional educational and communicative dimensions, they express:

- The intersection of the subject and its outcomes with the ICT domain, responding to technological challenges, grasping the benefits and risks of technology for digitized individuals as well as for society; specifically, online risks and cyber threats, including strategies for the safe use of the Internet.
- Strengthening the approach to understanding the media and media production, from an ethical or ethical-educational perspective; specifically, the challenges and risks posed by the media in this regard.
- The connection between media education and the games industry in the form of integration of the elements that characterize media literacy in digital games (especially critical thinking).
- Emphasis on the acquisition of media capability in a practical way through students' own productive activity, as well as on theoretical reflection on media and their products, with their added aesthetic dimension.
- Linking media literacy with other literacies (reading, information, digital, games), which corresponds to its cumulative concept (MIL).

The transdisciplinary approach and, at the same time, one of the modalities for integrating media education into the university curriculum is also manifested in the identification of its elements in related subjects, either explicitly or implicitly. They can be found explicitly, for example, in the subject "Media and Society" on the first year of the bachelor's degree in the study program Mediamatics and Cultural Heritage, Faculty of Humanities, University of Žilina. The objectives of the subject include the development of the ability to evaluate media content as part of being a media literate person (Fakulta humanitných vied UNIZA, 2023/2024). Similarly, the Faculty

FIGURE 2

MODALITIES OF DENOMINATION OF MEDIA EDUCATION
IN THE STUDY PROGRAMS

Source: The authors.

of Arts, Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica integrates the subject
"Cross-cutting Themes in Education" in the 2nd year of the master's
degree within the "Foundations of Teaching for the 2nd level of Higher
Education".[4]

The analysis of the educational offerings of the largest universities
in Slovakia showed that, except for one university (Pan-European
University with the Faculty of Media), 14 faculties and all nine
universities have a media education subject included in their study plans.
In addition, combinations of various forms of its explicit integration
into the curriculum were observed. The results confirmed the existence
of key actors or multipliers of higher education in media education,
which was also reflected in several modalities of its direct integration

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[4]   Implicitly, the subjects of the same university: "Empowerment and Digital
Participation", "Psyche in the Environment of Contemporary Technolo-
gies", "Children and Youth Literature and Media", "Digital Technologies
in Education", "Information security" or "Media in the Teaching of Foreign
Languages" contain elements of media education (Univerzita Mateja Bela
v Banskej Bystrici, 2023/24).

into the study plan, including the synergy of several units (faculties) of the university. Examples of its different modalities are presented below.

MULTIPLES (COMBINATIONS) OF VARIOUS FORMS OF EXPLICIT INTEGRATION OF MEDIA EDUCATION WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF DIFFERENT INSTITUTIONAL ACTORS

The Faculty of Mass Media Communication (FMK), the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius (UCM) in Trnava offer specialized study programs in media education, Applied Media Studies, at bachelor and master levels, and Media and Information Competencies, at doctoral level. It is remit of the sole Department of Media Education in Slovakia. The programs are specifically focused on the preparation of actor-multipliers, able to convey strategies and tools of development of media and informational competences of various target groups in media learning processes. This is especially with regard to current trends of digital media in the context of the development of an information and network society (Fakulta masmediálnej komunikácie UCM v Trnave, 2023). Upon completion of the two-year "Complementary Pedagogical Studies" (CPS), students can additionally acquire pedagogical competencies to teach the subject of Media Education in schools. The studies are offered by FMK in cooperation with the Faculty of Arts of the same university, which covers it. In addition, FMK teaches the compulsory elective subject "Media Competencies 1 and 2" in the Mass Media Communication study program in the first year of the master's degree, and the subject "Media Education and Digital Games" in the Digital Game Theory program in the third year of the bachelor's degree. Furthermore, the Faculty of Arts at this university has introduced the compulsory subject "Media Education" in the second year of the master's degree[5] in the program of Teaching Citizenship Education (in combination) (Figure 3).

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5   University studies in Slovakia usually last three years for the bachelor's degree and two years for the master's degree.

FIGURE 3

EXAMPLE OF EXPLICIT MULTIPLICATION OF MEDIA EDUCATION
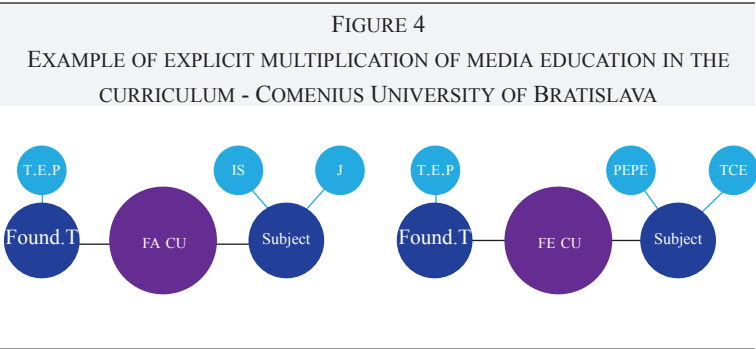IN THE CURRICULUM - FMK UCM IN TRNAVA
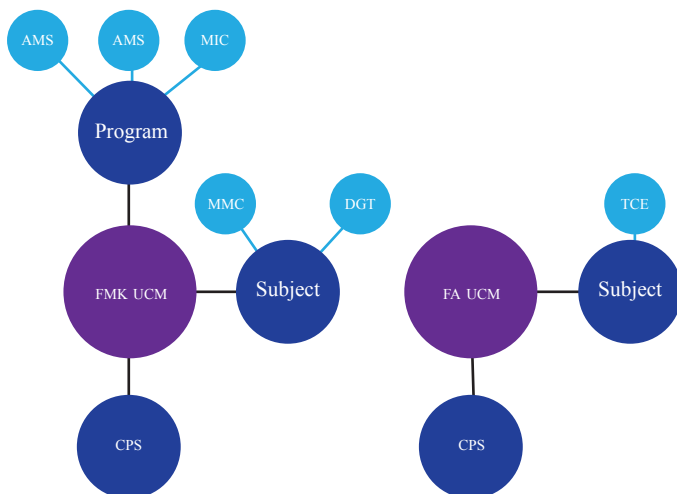
Source: The authors.

The largest public university in Slovakia, Comenius University in Bratislava, defines a compulsory elective subject "Media Education" within the Study of Teaching of Academic Subjects, taught by the Faculty of Arts ("TAS - Pedagogical-Psychological and Social Science Foundations for the 2nd level of Higher Education") in the master's degree studies.[6]

In addition, the faculty offers the compulsory subject "Introduction to Information and Media Literacy" in the second year of the bachelor's degree in Information Studies and the compulsory subject "Information and Media Literacy" in the first year of the master's degree. In the first year of the master's degree in Journalism, the compulsory elective

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[6]   In order to unify terminology and labeling in the figures we refer to it as "Foundations of Teaching" (Found.T) for Teacher Education Programs (T.E.P).

subject "Media Education for Journalists" is integrated. The Faculty of Education integrates the compulsory elective subject "Media Education" in the first and third year of the bachelor's degree in the program Common Socio-scientific, Pedagogical and Psychological Foundations of Teaching, available for Teacher Education Programs. The same subject is offered in the third year of the bachelor's degree in Preschool and Elementary Pedagogy. The compulsory subject "Media and Media Education" is in turn available in Teaching Citizenship Education (in combination) in the second year of the master's degree (Figure 4).

FIGURE 4

EXAMPLE OF EXPLICIT MULTIPLICATION OF MEDIA EDUCATION IN THE CURRICULUM - COMENIUS UNIVERSITY OF BRATISLAVA

Source: The authors.

Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra presents the multiple integration of the subject of media education in various programs of study. The Faculty of Arts has six such subjects. The elective subject "Education and Media" is offered in the first year of the master's degree in the philosophical program Applied Ethics - Ethical Expertise and Ethical Counseling and Teaching Ethics (in combination) (as a compulsory elective subject). At the same study level, the elective subject "Media Competencies and Media Practice" is taught in Aesthetics. In turn, Teaching Aesthetics Education (in combination) offers the compulsory elective subject "Practical Aesthetics - Media Education". The elective subject "Media Education" is integrated in the first year of the master's degree in Teaching Citizenship Education (in combination) as well as in Primary Education Teaching (as a

compulsory elective subject for external studies), which is offered by the Faculty of Education.

The study of journalism, on the other hand, offers the compulsory elective subject "Media Literacy" at the bachelor's degree level. The Faculty of Education also integrates the subject "Media Education and Cyber Threats" as a compulsory elective in the first years of the degree in Special Pedagogy, Education and Educational Management (for external studies), and in the 3rd year of the same degree in the Pedagogical, Psychological and Social Sciences Foundations of the Teaching Pedagogy and Teaching Psychology (in combination) (compulsory or compulsory elective subject) (Figure 5).

FIGURE 5

EXAMPLE OF EXPLICIT MULTIPLICATION OF MEDIA EDUCATION
IN CURRICULUM - UNIVERSITY OF CONSTANTINE THE
PHILOSOPHER IN NITRA
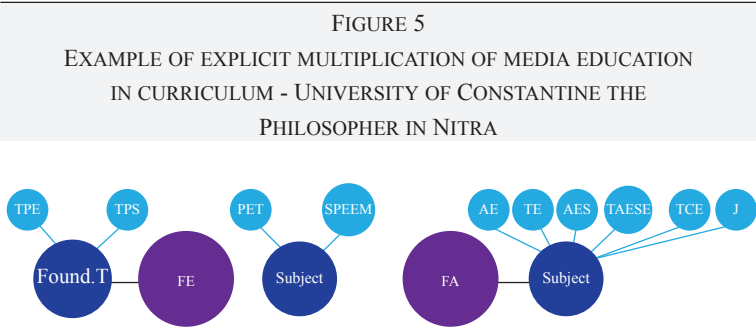
Source: The authors.

The University of Prešov integrates the subject "Media Education" in three programs. One of them is found with this title at the Greek-Catholic Theological Faculty in the study program Animation of Leisure Activities (third year of bachelor's degree) and Catholic Theology (first year of master's degree) as a compulsory elective subject. Within Media Studies at the Faculty of Arts, they have a compulsory subject entitled "Media Literacy and Media Education" in the first year of the bachelor's degree. In the higher degree, in the second year, the subject "Development of Media Competencies" is integrated as a compulsory elective. The faculty also offers media studies students two-year "CPS" with subject didactics focused on media education (Figure 6).

FIGURE 6

EXAMPLE OF EXPLICIT MULTIPLICATION OF MEDIA EDUCATION IN THE
CURRICULUM - UNIVERSITY OF PREŠOV
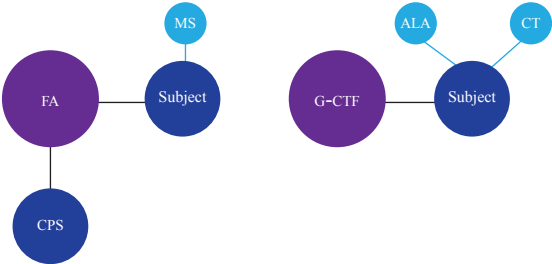
Source: The authors.

The Catholic University of Ružomberok is special due to the above-mentioned inclusion of the compulsory subject "Faculty Seminar 2 - Media Literacy and Digital Technologies" in the first year of bachelor's degree for all programs of the Faculty of Arts and Letters within the "Faculty Foundations". The study is conducted by the Department of Journalism, also organizing the teaching of the compulsory elective subject "Media Education" in the first year of the master's degree in Journalism. The Faculty of Education offers three compulsory electives in different programs. These are "Development of Digital and Media Literacy" (first year of bachelor's degree) in Preschool and Elementary Pedagogy, "Digital Media and Media Education" (third year of bach elor's degree) in Pedagogy, and "Media Education" (second year of master's degree) in Primary Education Teaching (Figure 7).

MULTIPLES (COMBINATIONS) OF VARIOUS FORMS OF EXPLICIT INTEGRATION OF MEDIA EDUCATION WITH THE INVOLVEMENT OF AN INSTITUTIONAL ACTOR

At the same time, multiplication of media education with the involvement of a faculty was identified in the case of Trnava University. Its Faculty of Education offers media education subjects in several

FIGURE 7

EXAMPLE OF EXPLICIT MULTIPLICATION OF MEDIA EDUCATION IN THE
CURRICULUM - CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF RUŽOMBEROK
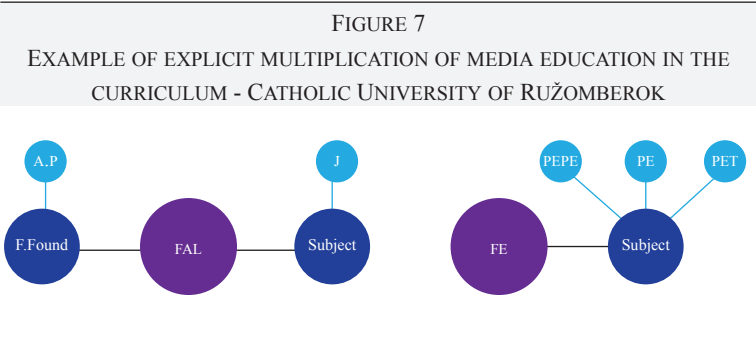
Source: The authors.

study programs. The mentioned compulsory elective subject "Reading
and Media Literacy" is integrated in all Teacher Education Programs
within the Foundations of Teaching (social science foundation) in the
second year of the bachelor's degree, as well as in the Animation of
Visual Arts program. At the master's level, the compulsory elective
subject "Media Education" is included in the programs Teaching Ethics
(in combination), Teaching Citizenship Education and Social Pedagogy
and Education (Figure 8).

FIGURE 8

EXAMPLE OF EXPLICIT MULTIPLICATION OF MEDIA EDUCATION IN THE
CURRICULUM - UNIVERSITY OF TRNAVA
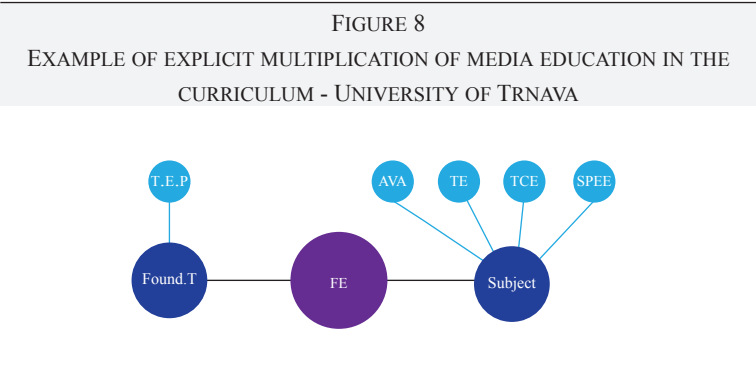
Source: The authors.

CONCLUSIONS

By evaluating the national curricular policy, we conclude that the integration of media education in Slovak universities is not limited to particular programs of study. In addition to traditional programs dedicated to the training of communication and education professionals, the results demonstrate its explicit application in a wider range of curricula, including theological and philosophical, as well as its broad multi- and transdisciplinary scope. This demonstrates the transdisciplinarity of the approach in its integration into the Slovak university curriculum.

In addition, the modalities of conceptualizing media education in Slovak university teaching were presented. We observed exemplary approaches demonstrating multimodality, i.e. a combined approach of various modalities, involving mainly two university faculties. These modes do not include –in comparison with foreign countries such as the Germanic ones– modular education, program specialization, or "extension study" in further teacher training. Slovak study plans of programs for communication professionals and teachers also contain subjects explicitly focused on media education, as noted previously (Kačinová, 2017), and the trend of their appearance is growing, which is a significant finding, compared to other countries with unsatisfactory situations.

In particular, graduate teacher preparation programs or primary and secondary teacher education plans of study rarely include media literacy or lack subjects focused on media education (Marzal-Felici & Aguaded, 2021; Meehan et al., 2015). This indicates the sensitivity of the subject in Slovak faculties preparing educators and media professionals. Faculties training communicators have long been leaders in this field, integrating the subject in almost all their programs. Moreover, the only three-degree study programs focused on media education are run by the Faculty of Mass Media Communication UCM in Trnava. They are unique, and not only in Slovak conditions. However, in Slovakia, media education is insufficiently integrated into cultural studies programs when compared to Germany.

This study is significant because of the lack of national educational policy research and comprehensive international analyses of university study plans regarding the representation of media education and its

educational practice. The results of the case study can inspire the development or reconstruction of curricular policies (educational policy makers, curriculum and university course content) at the international level, with respect to long-term efforts to implement the subject in university education. Moreover, the analyzed case of Slovak higher education practice demonstrating multi- and transdisciplinarity scope in the curricular integration of media education and its (multi) modality allows for greater evidence of the transdisciplinarity applied therein. Thus, it helps to understand or theorize media education as a transdisciplinary concept.

We conclude that we have not examined in detail the implicit inclusion of the subject in the study plans, although it is indicated that its programmatic scope is even greater. We have also applied a selective approach to study programs in the analysis, which does not exclude the interest of other programs in the subject in the environment of Slovak universities (Čiderová & Belvončíková, 2024). All this can be considered both a limit of the research and an opportunity to extend it.

SUPPORT

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