



Digital Media Literacy
for Active Citizenship



Comparative Report

Digital Media Literacy at School



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1. Introduction

The present Comparative Report contains an overview of the results of the first six months of activity of the [DIMELI4AC project](#).

The first section summarises the findings of a preliminary **policy and document analysis** conducted in Cyprus, Germany, Greece and Ireland in order to map out the status quo of digital education policies and their implementation at national level. After exploring the understanding of the concept of digital media literacy in their national contexts, both among the population and in the research field, partners from the three above-mentioned countries identified relevant national policies and investigated the integration of digital and media education in school curricula.

The second section of this Report is dedicated to a comparative analysis of the results of three **surveys for students, parents and teachers** conducted in Cyprus, Germany and Greece. The surveys were designed with a double purpose in mind: analysing the respondents' level of knowledge and interest in the topic of digital media literacy as well as collecting targeted information on their needs that would feed into the upcoming phases of project implementation. All surveys reached the pre-established target of respondents (50 students, 25 parents and 25 teachers per country) and highlighted interesting national specificities and needs, which are hereby presented in a comparative perspective.

The third and last section includes an overview of the outcomes of the **Focus Groups** conducted in the three countries involved in the survey implementation with the addition of Belgium (for EU-level stakeholders). Focus Group participants were presented the preliminary results of the surveys in their national context and were invited to reflect and share their views on a series of topics. This section of the Comparative Report presents a summary of their comments in a comparative perspective.

The final section of the Report draws on the national-level conclusions reached by each partner and brings them together in a final list of **recommendations**.

2. Mapping the scene

The status quo of Digital Media Literacy policies in Cyprus, Germany, Greece and Ireland

Within the context of the project, **digital media literacy** is defined as

The ability to access, analyse, evaluate, and create media.

*Media literate citizens are better able to **understand** the complex messages we receive from all forms of media. It empowers citizens with **knowledge, skills and attitude** to **critically access** information and media, to **critically analyse** information and media content and to **engage** with media and other information providers for social, civic and creative purposes.*

Are state and school administrations taking action to support the implementation of digital and media education policies? Are they making a conscious effort to promote the development of digital media literacy and critical thinking skills among the younger population? And to what extent?

The first section of this Comparative Report summarises the findings of a preliminary policy and document analysis conducted in Cyprus, Germany and Greece in order to map out the status quo of digital education policies and their implementation.

Despite their evident differences, the three countries under examination presented some interesting common elements which can be summarised as follows:

✓ **Policy making and implementation in the field of education: an unevenly shared responsibility**

Cyprus, Germany, Greece and Ireland have different forms of state, implying a different distribution of responsibilities with respect to schooling and education.

As far as digital and media education is concerned, **Greece** and **Ireland** appear to be adopting the most integrated approach. In Greece, the design and implementation of policies addressing the use of the Internet in education is managed by two specific state bodies under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs: the [Institute of Educational Policy](#) (IEP) and the [Computer Technology Institute and Press Diophantus](#) (CTI), which reaches out directly to schools via the [Greek School Network](#) (GSN). In Ireland, responsibility for digital literacy education for the younger population is shared among core actors of the state education system, including the Department of Education and Skills (DES), the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and the Professional Development Service for Teachers

(PDST). Media literacy education in a broader, cross-generational perspective is the responsibility of the Broadcast Authority of Ireland (BAI).

Cyprus also employs a centralized education system, but despite recent modernisation efforts it has yet to establish a national body in charge of implementing digital media literacy policies. At the time of writing, statutory responsibility for media literacy is delegated to the [Cyprus Radio Television Authority](#), a key regulatory body which offers basic training activities for schools in collaboration with the Pedagogical Institute of the Ministry of Education and Culture.

The **German** education sector presents a quite different scenario: its less-than-centralised system poses objective difficulties in achieving harmonic and sustainable digital education reforms. With schooling responsibilities individually delegated to the sixteen federal states, ensuring an equal implementation of digital and media education policies will certainly prove challenging.

✓ “First-generation” policies: infrastructural development

Digital education policies focusing on infrastructural development are generally considered to be part of a wider “first-generation” policy reform, as laid out by the European Commission’s *e-Learning Action Plan* of 2001¹. All countries involved in this study seem to have started implementing at least some of the actions recommended by the Commission, namely: enabling high-speed Internet access; providing access to educational services and e-learning platforms; offering basic teacher training on the use of digital technologies; and adapting school curricula to include new ways of learning ICT.

At the time of writing, Cyprus, Greece and Ireland seem to have achieved a satisfactory level of infrastructural development. On the contrary, and despite major planned investments in digital education, German schools are still widely afflicted by poor wireless connection, lack of IT support and inadequate teacher training.

✓ “Second-generation” policies: teacher training and capacity building

As highlighted by “second-generation” EC policy documents², after a first stage of infrastructural development, digital education policies should shift their focus on complementary measures such as teacher training, competence building and content development.

In line with the above findings, Cyprus, Greece and Ireland seem to be consciously heading in the direction indicated by the Commission: state administrations are intensifying their efforts to improve teacher training and capacity building as well as to adapt school curricula to include digital and media education (either cross-curricula or as a standalone, optional module). Germany’s recent investments, on the contrary, have come under criticism for focusing on the improvement of hard skills to the detriment of critical competences, increasingly needed by students and teacher alike in order to engage safely and effectively with media.

¹ See http://www.aic.lv/ace/ace_disk/Bologna/contrib/EU/e-learn_ACPL.pdf.

² See [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0607\(01\)&rid=2](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0607(01)&rid=2) and <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2018:22:FIN>.

Comparative Report: Digital Media Literacy at School



Overall, the four countries appear aligned in their commitment to advance digital education: in line with European trends, over the past two decades they have all pledged substantial investments in technology for schools, which have contributed (to varying degrees) to the renewal or advancement of school ICT infrastructures. With the possible exception of Germany, participating countries seem to be stepping forward into “second-generation” policies by placing greater emphasis on the need to upgrade teachers’ knowledge and digital skills sets, not only in terms of hard skills but also of digital media literacy and critical thinking.

3. National research on digital media literacy

Survey results from students, parents and teachers

In order to analyse the needs of the project target groups, a quantitative analysis was conducted among students aged 10 to 15, their parents and teachers in Cyprus, Germany and Greece. Three targeted surveys were developed and distributed among a sample of interested individuals in order to investigate their prior knowledge of the concept of digital media literacy and their experience as to how the topic is approached in school and at home. Finally, the respondents were invited to express their needs and preferences with regard to a few of the upcoming project results.

Are you familiar with the concept of digital media literacy? Do you think you have good digital skills? Is it important to learn about digital media literacy? Who should be responsible for digital and media education? Are governments and school managements making efforts to support it?

These are some of the questions we asked, and here is what our respondents had to say.

Your thoughts: students, parents and teachers' thoughts on digital media literacy

The three surveys were structured in a similar fashion, although obviously adapted to the context of each group of respondents. The first section was dedicated to introducing them to the concept of digital media literacy and gauging their first impressions and level of knowledge.

Are you familiar with the concept of digital media literacy?

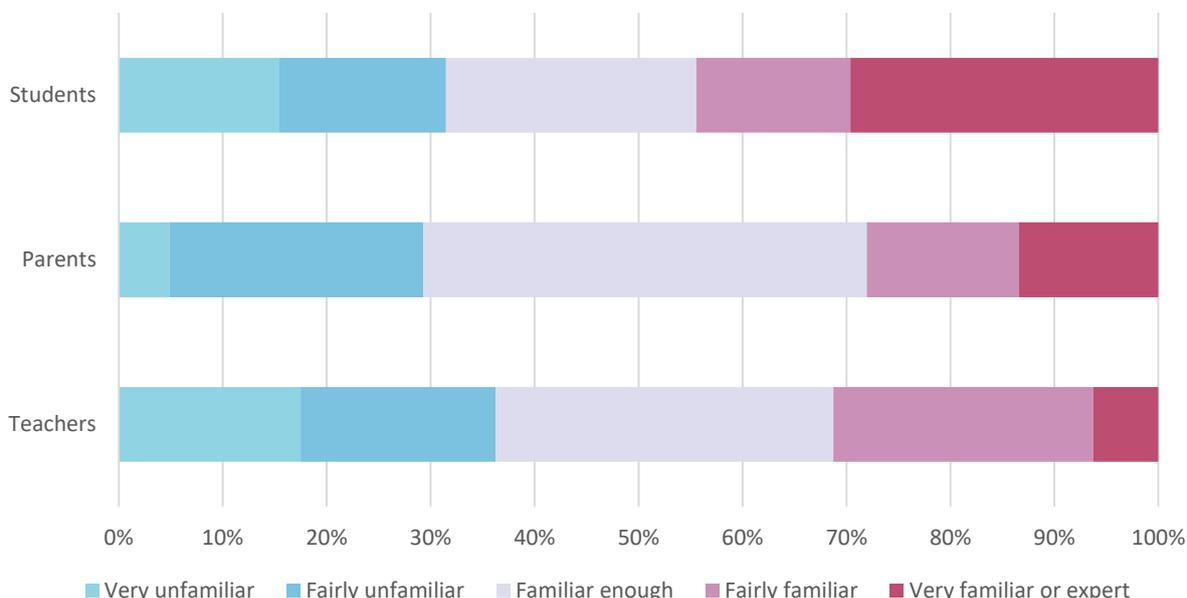
Among the first questions, students, parents and teachers were invited to self-assess their level of familiarity with the concept of digital media literacy based on a provided definition.

Results show that the target groups were on average **relatively familiar** with the concept of digital media literacy: on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 = very unfamiliar and 5 = very familiar/expert, responses gathered around middle-upper values.

Students tended to consider themselves slightly more competent than their parents and teachers, particularly in Germany where over 60% of them evaluated themselves as “very familiar” with the concept. The majority of parents, however, rated their children’s level of familiarity with the topic “average” at best. Cypriot and German parents appeared particularly doubtful and not even one of them placed their children in the top tier.

Greek parents and teachers, on the other hand, appeared quite confident in their own understanding of the concept of digital media literacy (64% and 46% respectively rated themselves as “very familiar” or “experts”), while Cypriot parents and German teachers were among the less confident (56% and 68% respectively considered themselves “unfamiliar” or “very unfamiliar” with the topic).

How familiar are you with the concept of digital media literacy?



When asked if they would be interested in **learning more about digital media literacy**, respondents expressed a generalised positive interest: over 80% of the students were open to the possibility, and so were 100% of the parents. Given the option to choose between “Yes, for myself” and “Yes, for my children”, parents clearly expressed that their interest in the topic was focused on the benefits for their sons and daughters (over 97% of responses), but a fair amount of them also considered it an opportunity for self-development (almost 38% of responses), particularly in Germany. In line with this finding, over 70% of the parents expressed the belief that the acquisition of digital media literacy skills by students was to be considered “very” or “extremely important”.

The target groups were also asked to identify **potential sources of information on digital media literacy**: both parents and students would rely primarily on the Internet (over 90% of responses), but while for parents researching books or articles came in as a close second, students would rather consult teachers, parents or peers in person.

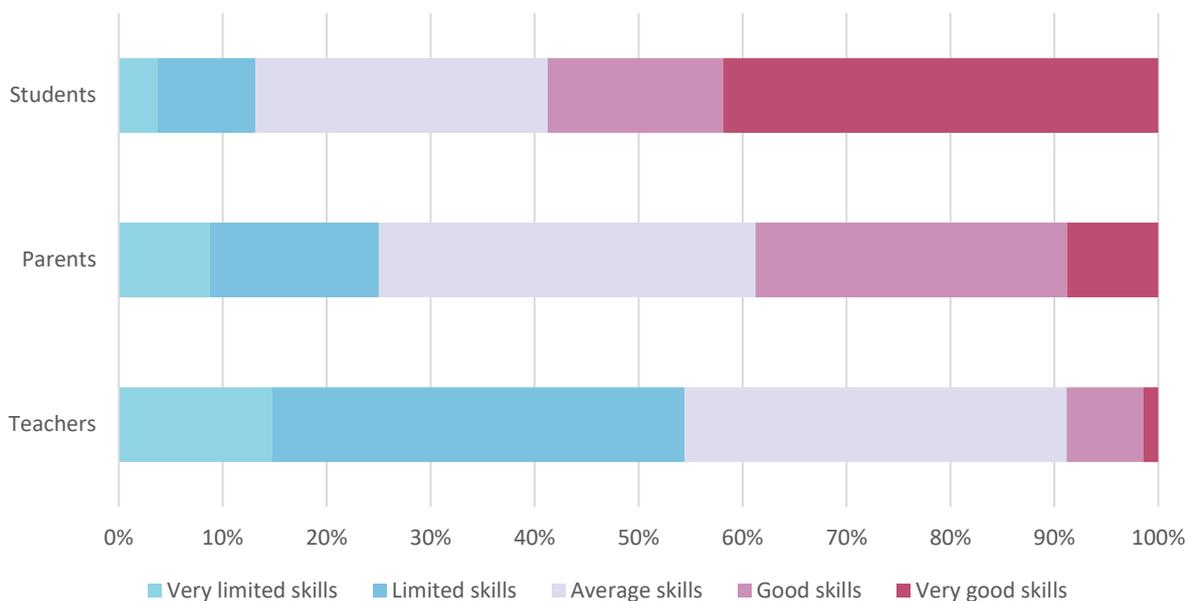
Do you think you have good digital skills?

Students appeared **quite confident** in their digital skills: over 58% agreed more or less emphatically with the question, with a remarkable 86% of German students stating that they “definitely” had good digital skills. Cypriot students appeared slightly less confident, with the majority of them considering their digital skills only “average”.

This is in line with the perception of **parents**: when asked if they thought their children had good digital skills, only 8% defined them as “definitely” very good; the majority of responses gather around middle values, with slightly higher results in Greece and slightly lower results in Cyprus.

Teachers demonstrated a slightly more critical opinion of their students’ digital skills: 84% of their responses placed students’ skills in the average-lower end of the scale, with Cypriot teachers holding a particular strong view of the fact that **students’ perception of their digital skills mostly doesn’t correspond to reality**.

Perception of the digital skills of students

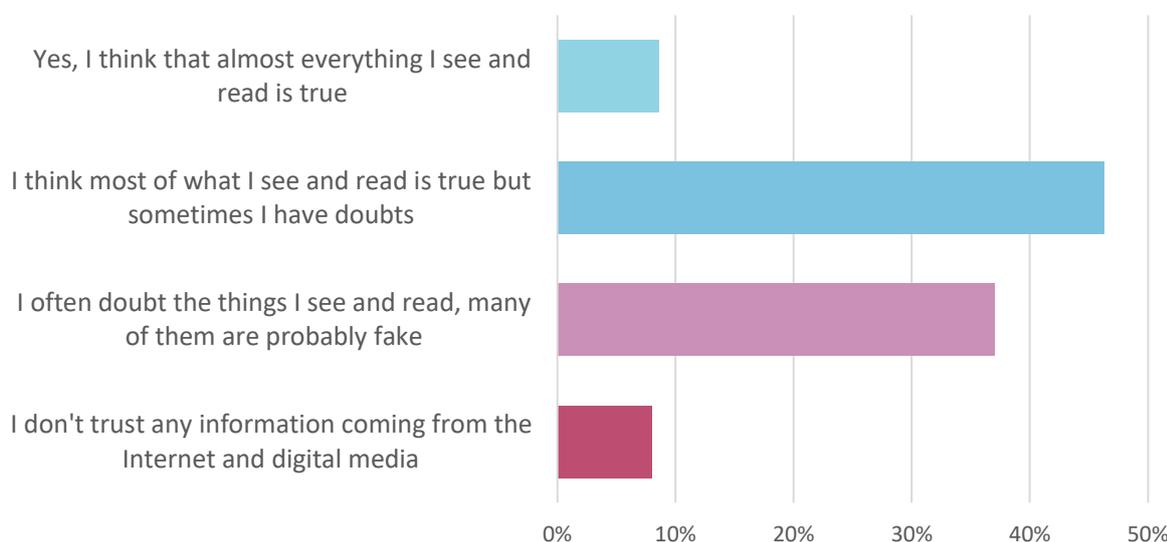


Do you trust everything you see and read on the Internet and other digital media?

Students were asked to define their **level of trust** in the validity of the information received from digital media based on a scale that went from “I think that almost everything I see and read is true” to “I don’t trust any information coming from the Internet and digital media”.

Quite interestingly, results showed that most of the students avoided the two extreme answers and tended to gather in the middle, **hovering between relative trust and relative distrust** in the media: 46% of them voted for the option “I think most of what I see and read and is true but sometimes I have doubts” and 37% chose the option “I often doubt the things that I see and read, many of them are probably fake”.

German students tended to lean towards trust (63% trust versus 36% distrust), while in both Cyprus and Greece the options mentioned above received the exact same number of answers.



At school: how students, parents and teachers experience digital media literacy in the school environment

This section of the three surveys focused on investigating students', teachers' and (to a smaller extent) parents' experiences related to teaching and learning about digital media literacy at school.

How often do you talk about digital media literacy in class?

The majority of students agreed that the topic of digital media literacy is **rarely discussed in class**: over 73% of German students stated that it had “never” or “hardly ever” been covered or mentioned, and the same was confirmed by 70% and 50% of the students from Greece and Cyprus respectively.

Teachers indirectly endorsed such response by stating that on average 66% of their schools did not foresee any **curricular hours** dedicated to digital media literacy education. While this result aligns with the state of things in Greece, differences among countries were quite drastic: only 4% of the respondents from Cyprus gave a positive answer, while in Germany these represented a majority of over 62%.

German teachers specified that digital media literacy education is usually **integrated** into one specific subject (mostly ICT but also civic education and ethics); when the approach was cross-curricular, the same subjects were mentioned, with two teachers remarking that digital media literacy could potentially play a major role across all school subjects. Greece and Cyprus seemed to adopt a single-subject approach and in both cases, when digital media literacy was present in schools, it was during ICT classes.

Does your school offer the necessary ICT infrastructure to support digital and media education classes?

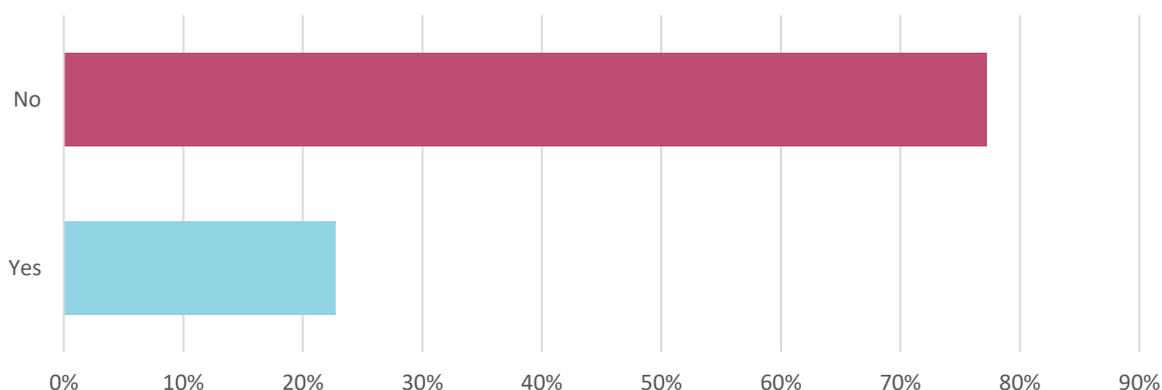
Despite differences in the implementation of digital- and media-related classes, 59% of teachers agreed that their schools “definitely” offered the necessary ICT infrastructure to support them. This result represents an average between very positive responses from Greece and Germany (respectively with 92% and 72% of satisfied or very satisfied respondents) and less enthusiastic feedback from Cyprus (where 95% of respondents were less than satisfied).

Did you receive any specific training before being charged with teaching digital and media education classes?

Most of the teachers who took part in the survey (over 68%) had **never taught classes** dealing with the topic of digital media literacy. Those who had mostly included teachers of mathematics, national or foreign languages and humanities.

The most interesting finding from this section of the survey concerns the issue of teacher training: over **77%** of those who had had experience teaching digital or media education classes stated that they had **not received any specific training** before being charged with such task.

Did you receive any specific training before being charged with teaching digital/media education classes?



Despite such obvious limitation, teachers appeared quite resourceful in identifying **sources of information and inspiration** to plan their digital media literacy classes: most of them appeared to rely primarily on Internet research (91%), followed closely by books, articles and teaching resources (68%); many also sought the advice of colleagues (36%) or inspiration from social media, particularly Pinterest (18%). The same distribution of results could be observed in response to a similar question dedicated to teachers who had never had experience teaching digital media literacy classes, who were invited to imagine where they would look for information if they were asked to start teaching such classes and no training opportunity was available.

While over 81% of the teachers described themselves as “discreetly” to “very confident” in teaching digital- or media-related classes, 79% of them also stated that they would be **interested in receiving specific training** on the topic.

At home: students and parents’ experience of digital media literacy in the family environment

The third section of the survey focused on the extent to which digital- and media-related issues are a topic of discussion at home; for obvious reasons this section was dedicated exclusively to parents and students.

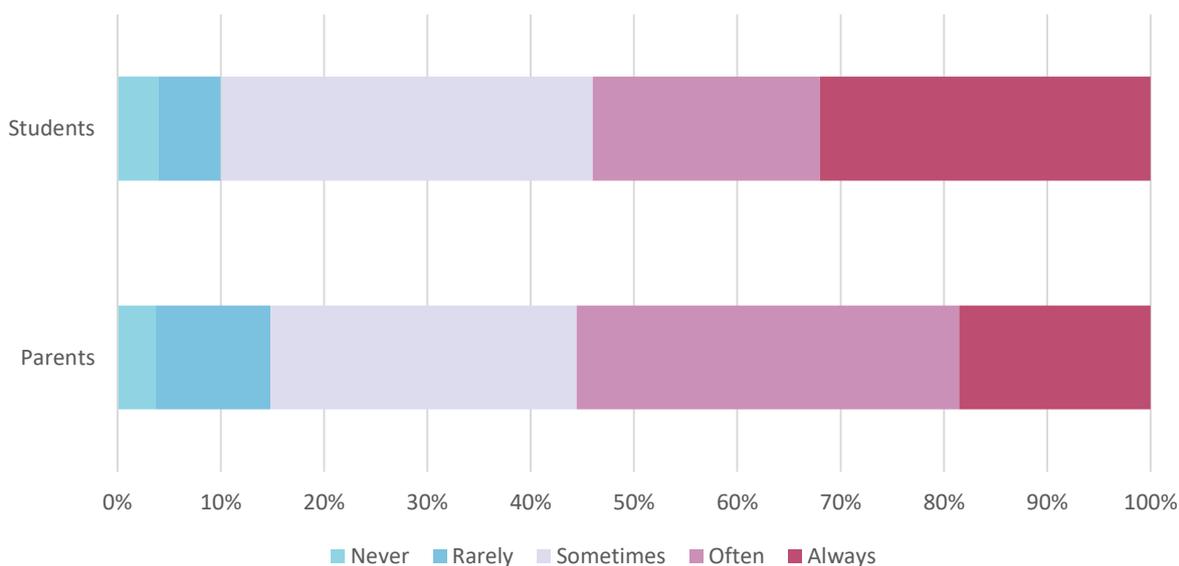
How often do you talk about digital media literacy at home?

Digital media literacy does not appear to be a frequent **topic of conversation or discussion at home**: 63% of students stated that was “never” or “hardly ever” mentioned. Parents seemed to have a slightly different opinion on this as only one third of them offered the same response; the remaining 66% reported that the topic was discussed “sometimes” or “often”.

The following question fetched equally different responses: students and parents were asked whether the former ever asked **questions on digital- or media-related topics** to the latter (e.g. asking for advice on something they saw or read online). Over two thirds of the students said that it never happened; on the contrary, over two thirds of the parents affirmed that they did respond to questions on the topic from their sons and daughters.

When it came to answering such questions, both groups seemed quite confident in the **ability of parents to provide satisfying answers**, the students even more so than the parents themselves: an impressive 32% of students stated that their mothers and fathers “always knew how to answer”. Parents themselves appeared slightly less confident in their own abilities; however, only 10% of the students and 15% of the parents stated that parents “never” or “hardly ever” knew how to answer.

Do parents know how to answer digital- and media-related question?



Have you ever helped your parents / children acquire a digital skill?

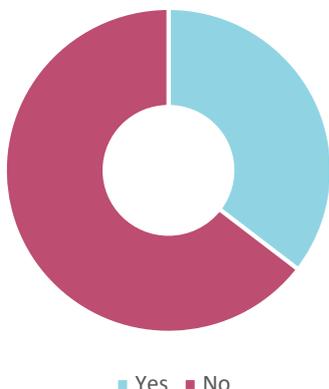
Before closing the section on digital media literacy at home, the survey sought to investigate if and how **digital skills** are acquired in the **family environment**: are parents and students **learning from each other**? And what?

Survey responses showed that only approximately **one third** of parents and students had had any experience of reciprocal learning, and both sides tended to offer more positive responses when asked “if they had ever helped” as opposed to “if they had even been helped” by the other.

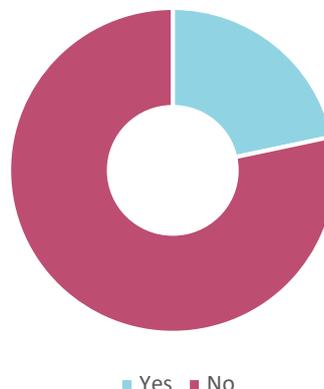
In the case of **parents helping their children** learn new skills, parents stated that this happened slightly more frequently (35%) than the students would like to admit (22%). Results in Cyprus and Greece were slightly higher than the average, while German parents and students didn’t seem to have much to learn from each other: only 5% of students and 19% of parents replied positively to this question.

Do parents help their children acquire digital skills?

Parents



Students



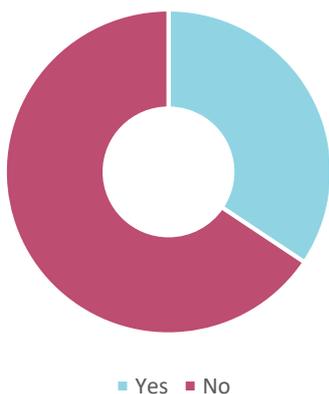
The **areas of shared knowledge** were also slightly different. Students’ replies showed that parents often represent their children’s first and preferential introductory channel to technology and digital devices. Several students indicated “learning how to use a computer or a smartphone” as the primary skill they learned from their mothers and fathers, closely followed by the operative knowledge of specific software (MS Excel, MS PowerPoint). A number of students also mentioned “robotics” and a few referred to critical thinking skills such as recognising reliable and unreliable websites and news outlets.

Parents offered slightly different responses. While they also remarked that they were the ones to teach their children how to use the Internet and search for information online, several answers pointed to more transversal skills such as learning how to check the sources of information retrieved online, how to manage privacy settings and behave responsibly on social media and how to deal with cyberbullying.

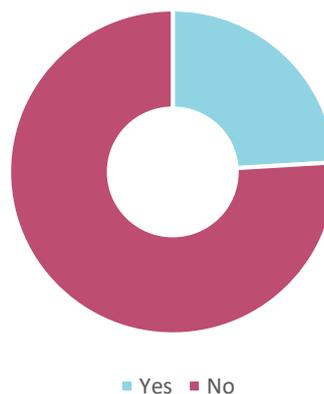
A similar pattern can be identified in the corresponding question investigating whether **children ever help their parents** develop new digital skills. The proportions were very similar to the ones highlighted above: 32% of the students stated they had assisted a parent learn a new digital skill but only 24% of the parents agreed with that statement. Similarly to what described above, results from Greece and Cyprus were above such average while only 22% of German students and 9% of German parents recognised a shared learning experience.

Do students help their parents acquire digital skills?

Students



Parents

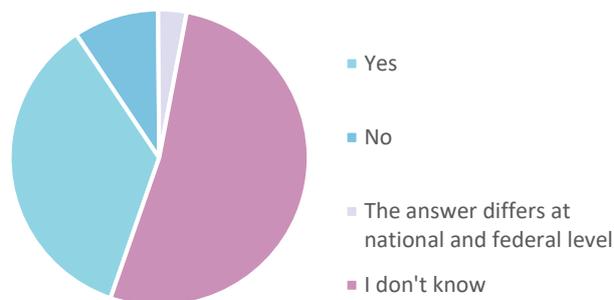


When it comes to the **specific skills** being transmitted by students to their parents, results from the two perspectives aligned very closely. The overwhelming majority of students claimed ownership over setting up their parents’ social media accounts, specifically Instagram and Facebook. Other students mentioned support in downloading mobile games and other apps, including instant messaging services such as Viber. Less parents responded positively to this question but their replies matched their children’s and included the use of social media, apps and in a few case the use of the Internet.

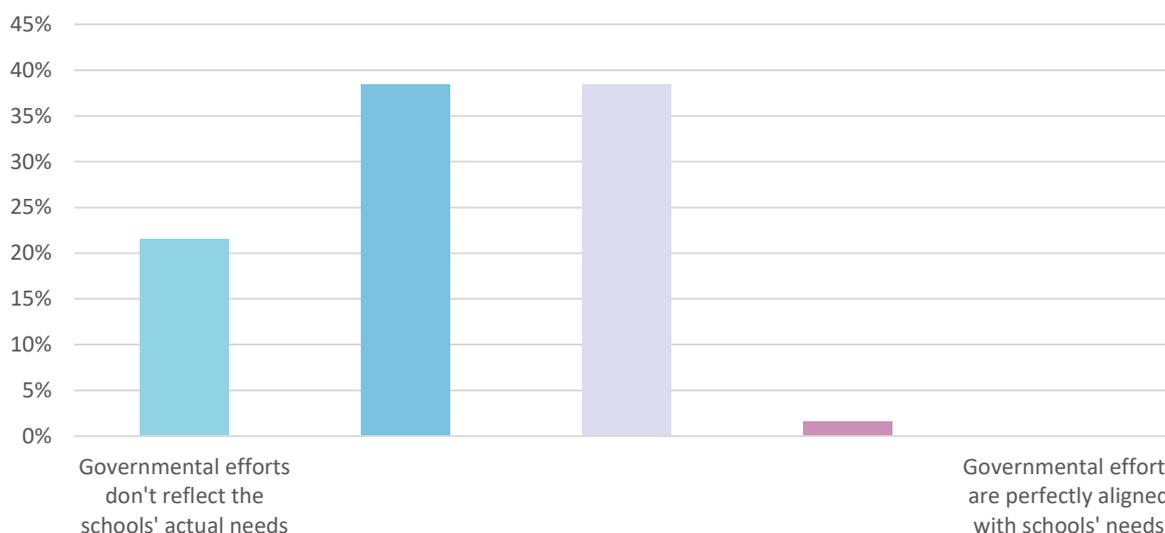
Your country: teachers’ understanding and opinion of their country’s education policies

At the end of their survey, teachers were asked whether they were informed about their **national government’s efforts (if any) to support digital and media education in school** (e.g. action plans, planned investments in the sectors etc.).

Over 52% of respondents stated they were **not aware** whether their government was taking concrete measures in that regard; 9% of teachers were confident that their national authorities were not taking action to support digital education, while 35% affirmed that they saw a concrete commitment in that direction.



The 35% of teachers who confirmed the existence of specific actions towards digital education, however, did **not** appear **very satisfied** with their governments’ chosen courses of action.



60% of respondents stated that governmental efforts did not reflect their schools’ actual needs, and over 38% only reported an average level of satisfaction. None of the teachers saw a satisfactory level of correspondence between governmental measures and school needs.

4. The expert opinion of teachers and stakeholders

Results from the Focus Group dialogue

In order to consolidate and enrich the findings of the three national surveys, each country involved in the first research phase also conducted a **local Focus Group with teachers and/or education stakeholders**. Each group of experts was presented the preliminary findings of the three surveys and participants were invited to express their first impressions and opinions.

First impressions: can you confirm these findings based on your experience?

Focus Group participants generally found themselves in agreement with the findings of the three surveys and they all concurred that the **target groups would benefit from a deeper understanding of the topic of digital media literacy**. Participants from Germany and Greece were particularly vocal about their students' perceived **inability to approach media content critically**: despite being undoubtedly very familiar with digital devices and online platforms, they stated that their approach tended to be superficial and uninformed. Cypriot participants pointed to a top-down approach as the best long-term solution to this issue: they suggested engaging national-level stakeholders and policy makers in order to grant digital media literacy education a more prominent role in school curricula.

Participants from Cyprus and Belgium agreed on this issue but also highlighted the lack of critical thinking skills among teachers and parents. The former, it was argued, would need **better training opportunities on the topic of digital media literacy**, which in turn would require a stronger commitment on the part of school administrations as well as of older, less digitally-inclined colleagues. Parents too would benefit from an increased understanding of digital and media issues: Belgian participants to the Focus Group pointed out that in many cases parents' excessive trust in the media discredits them in the eyes of their children, who as a result turn to other sources when in need of advice.

On a slightly different note, some of the German teachers involved pointed out that their experience didn't match survey findings with respect to **ICT infrastructure in schools**: survey responses from Germany presented a fairly positive picture but the teachers involved remarked that in several schools the availability of digital devices and tools was still limited and often affected by lack of maintenance.

Areas of improvement: is any information about digital media literacy or the use of digital media missing or insufficiently presented?

All Focus Group participants agreed the topic is still fairly **new**, especially in terms of implementation in schools, and very **broadly defined**. It was recommended that the definition be split and redefined into concrete targets: this will allow the development of more specific teaching material as well as easier assessment of students' accomplishments in term of digital and media literacy.

Teaching digital media literacy: which are the most important factors to keep in mind?

German participants to the Focus Group highlighted the importance of **familiarising students with digital media literacy issues as early as possible**, since the meaning of this concept is expected to grow and evolve over the next few years (e.g. role and impact of fake news, micro targeting, clickbait etc.).

This clearly ties in with the **centrality of critical thinking**. Belgian and other European stakeholders were particularly sensitive to the obstacles that teaching critical thinking can present: is it possible to maintain an apolitical stance when analysing biased media? And even more importantly, is it possible to teach critical thinking without influencing students on what they should be critical about?

The same group also discussed the apparent issue of “students knowing more than their teachers”: survey results indicated that young people tend to be “**digitally confident**” but not quite as “**digitally competent**”. All participants agreed on the importance to boost teachers’ knowledge and confidence in the topic and Cypriot teachers suggested that the best way to go about digital media literacy education would be to adopt a “subtle but precise” approach which would empower students to engage safely with digital media and recognise their teachers’ authority on the topic.

School curricula: what should be added or reworked in order to strengthen the digital media literacy of students?

Focus Group participants in all countries agreed on the importance of including digital media literacy and critical thinking education in school curricula. The topic is generally mentioned sporadically rather than being given dedicated space, and this tends to happen (if at all) within one single class.

There was general agreement around the necessity to **redesign and update school curricula** in order to favour the development of critical thinking skills over the acquisition of copious amounts of knowledge. The topic of digital media literacy naturally lends itself to a cross-curricular approach: a critical approach to information lays at the basis of all school subjects and critical thinking would more easily become part of the students’ mind set if it was taught with a cross-curricular approach.

Greek participants to the Focus Group stressed the need for **effective advocacy efforts and policy reform**: while their government recognises the importance of digital media literacy education and the scarcity of training opportunities for teachers, it still lacks a comprehensive forward-looking strategy to tackle this issue.

Next stages of the project: what to keep in mind? What to improve?

In light of the considerations expressed above, all Focus Group participants emphasised the importance of the development of **targeted and effective teaching and learning materials**. They suggested consulting a variety of experts from fields such as IT and social media and working together with teachers, parents and students to develop materials that address their individual needs as well as their national specificities.

5. Conclusion

The activities conducted so far have led to the collection of precious insights into the perception of digital media literacy among the target groups and highlighted challenges and opportunities related to teaching and learning critical thinking skills.

In light of the above findings and of the upcoming project activities, the following recommendations are put forward:

- ✓ *Redefining the concept of digital media literacy into concrete targets:* digital media literacy is a broad and multi-faceted concept which lends itself to different definitions. This became evident when students, parents and teachers were asked to assess their digital skills as well as their level of familiarity with the topic: students tended to reflect a narrower view of the topic, and therefore higher levels of confidence; their parents and teachers, on the contrary, appeared more aware of the far-reaching implication of digital and media issues, and therefore scored lower in terms of confidence. Redefining the concept of digital media literacy into concrete target will allow students, parents and teachers to achieve a comprehensive vision of the implications of the issue, and therefore to identify with confidence their current competences and areas of improvement.
- ✓ *Increasing efforts to introduce digital media education in schools:* the ideal approach to achieve effective results would include bottom-up as well as top-down action. The lack of digital media literacy education in schools can be attributed to two concurring factors: a lack of expertise on part of the teachers and insufficient commitment or flexibility on part of the school administrations. As remarked throughout the present Report, teachers need to gain access to consistent and high-quality training opportunities to build their expertise and confidence in digital- and media-related topics. On the other hand, schools should open up to the possibility of giving space to digital media literacy education in their curricula, either within a single subject or ideally across a variety of subjects, in order to facilitate the adoption of a critical mind set among students. This reconfirms the importance of distilling all data, experiences and good practices collected through project activities into effective final recommendations to be presented to relevant policy makers; this will allow to couple the project's bottom-up efforts with high-level awareness raising and advocacy.
- ✓ *Developing opportunities for inter-generational learning:* survey findings showed that students and their parents hold a slightly different understanding of the concept of digital media literacy, and thus different skills and confidence levels – which do not always match. Parents tended to place themselves in the lower end of the confidence scale, and some of the findings presented above suggest that their excessive trust in the media risks to discredit them in the eyes of their children. On the other hand, students that took part in the surveys reported that their parents remained a point of reference when navigating the digital world, and that, despite the perceived skills gap, parents did have something to teach when it came to transversal competences such as critical thinking. Such findings suggest that there is space for shared learning experiences across different generations, and such possibility deserves to be explored further.

- ✓ *Taking stock of students, parents and teachers' interest in learning more about digital media literacy:* all of the research presented above highlights that the centrality of digital- and media-related issues is well perceived and expected to grow in the upcoming years. This represent fertile ground for the development of targeted teaching and learning materials which should address present challenges while keeping an eye on sustainability.