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Main Issues of Implementing Media and Information Literacy in School Education in Central Asian Countries (The Case of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan)

ABSTRACT

In today's interconnected world, implementing media and information literacy (MIL) into school education is essential to equip students with the critical skills needed to navigate an increasingly complex information landscape and discern between credible sources and misinformation. By fostering a generation of media-literate individuals, students can be empowered to become responsible consumers, creators, and contributors in the digital age, thus safeguarding democratic principles and promoting informed civic engagement. This research paper delves into the critical challenges surrounding the implementation of MIL in school education across Central Asian countries, with a specific focus on Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. Through a comprehensive examination, the study addresses key issues such as the perceptions of MIL trainers and experts regarding its significance, exemplary approaches for integration into school education, assessment methods of MIL education programs, differences between Central Asian and global MIL programs, the impact of MIL deficiency on the educational system, and the potential consequences of neglecting its implementation. Drawing on in-depth interviews, existing literature, and comparative analyses, the paper sheds light on the complexities and implications of MIL implementation within the unique context of Central Asia.

1 Introduction

The implementation of media and information literacy (MIL) in secondary school curricula or the organization of formal, informal classes and trainings among school-age children has already begun in many countries around the world.

Research shows that attempts to learn media education, media literacy and its implementation into education began in many countries with film education, and was then expanded across a wider spectrum (press, television, Internet, etc.).

> Media Literacy is a 21st century approach to education. It provides a framework to access, analyse, evaluate and create messages in a variety of forms – from print to video to the Internet. Media literacy builds an understanding of the role of media in society as well as essential skills of inquiry and self-expression necessary for citizens of a democracy. (Thoman & Jolls, 2003, p. 21)

Today, media literacy is taught as a separate subject in the humanities in the United Kingdom and Australia. Northern Ireland (United Kingdom) has introduced media education as a stand-alone subject and in Australia, "Media Arts" is one of five subjects in the Curriculum for The Arts, while in Finland it has been included in high school curricula. In the 1990s, media literacy in the country was replaced by the concept of media education. In Sweden, it has been taught as a separate subject in educational institutions since the 1980s.

Schools in Germany began their media education practice with its integration into the required curriculum. Media education was included into the Arts, Geography, and Social Sciences. In the opinion of many modern German teachers, the study of media culture should promote the development of the civic self-consciousness of pupils and their critical thinking. Media culture is taught in the majority of German universities and in addition there are several research institutes, such as the National Institute of Film in Science (FWU). It publishes literature and teaching aids for schools (videos, leaflets, brochures, etc.) (Fedorov, 2014). Other research centres are located at Kassel University (in München) and Humboldt University (in Berlin).

According to Yates (2004), recent research indicates that all 50 states have school curricula frameworks that contain one or more elements that call for some form of media literacy education. Such findings indicate that media literacy is slowly becoming an integral part of school curricula. However, full adoption of media literacy programs has yet to occur.

In today's Internet age, it is important for all countries to promote MIL among young people and increase their knowledge and skills in this field. Central Asian countries have entered the process, albeit belatedly. These countries are also making their first efforts to introduce MIL in secondary school education.

Several organizations, with the support of various foreign donors, are conducting training courses for secondary school teachers, and pilot classes have been organized in schools, as well as publishing textbooks and manuals. Therefore, the study of this topic is both scientifically and practically important today.

The main aim of this research paper is to critically examine the implementation of MIL in school education within Central Asian countries, with a focus on Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan.

The research questions are as follows:

RQ1: What are the perceptions and opinions of MIL trainers and experts regarding the significance of implementing MIL in Central Asia?

RQ2: What are the exemplary approaches for integrating MIL into school education in Central Asian countries?

RQ3: How do MIL education programs in Central Asian countries assess and define their success?

RQ4: In what ways do MIL education programs in Central Asian countries differ from those in other regions globally?

RQ5: How does the deficiency in MIL impact the educational framework within Central Asian countries?

RQ6: What are the potential repercussions of overlooking the integration of MIL into school education in Central Asian countries?

2 Literature Review

In many countries, MIL has become part of school curricula. Educators have discovered that MIL is essential and an effective, engaging way to apply critical thinking skills to a wide range of topics. Because media technologies develop rapidly and media systems are complex and ever-changing, MIL has become an essential skill all around the world (Braesel & Karg, 2018).

Alper and Herr-Stephenson (2013) argue that media literacy education is necessary for fostering informed, critical, and engaged citizens. However, an equally important consideration which has not been adequately addressed, is ensuring that the media literacy course syllabus in schools and universities are relevant to the needs and challenges of contemporary society (Salleh et al., 2019). Australia, Canada, England, South Africa, Scandinavia, Russia as among other countries in Europe, South America and Asia were among the first countries to have implemented media literacy within their school curriculum. Most of these curricula focus on educating society, especially children and teenagers, to critically scrutinize and evaluate media messages (Tselykh & Levitskaya, 2022; Leong & Kho, 2022).

Many researchers and organizations, even those advocating for media literacy education, overlook adults' media literacy needs (Livingstone et al., 2005). According to scholars, those who have recently entered adulthood also need media literacy skills and abilities (Dennis, 2004).

In different sources, media literacy skills are measured based on different criteria. Scholars also classify media literacy skills and abilities differently. Components of media literacy include knowledge of media messages, media audiences, media content, media industries, media effects, the real world, and the self (Martens, 2010; Potter, 2015; McWhorter, 2020).

Similarly, researchers report that children's writing about media characters, superheroes, and television programmes in the context of media literacy education demonstrates high levels of motivation and engagement (Alvermann et al., 1999).

The researchers found that the students who received the media literacy curriculum showed statistically significant greater gains in their ability to identify construction techniques, point of view, omitted information, comparison-contrast, and message purpose. The researchers concluded that the students who received media literacy instruction were more likely to "recognize the complex blurring of information, entertainment and economics that are present in contemporary nonfiction media" (Hobbs & Frost, 2003, p. 351).

Media literacy has also been used by second language teachers to engage learners, who have discovered that in the classroom, the use of video, news media and popular culture texts are perceived by language learners as intrinsically interesting (Mackey, 2002).

Douglas and Share (2019) provided both a theoretical framework and practical applications for educators and teacher education programs to transform education by putting critical media literacy into action in classrooms with students from kindergarten to university.

In most cases in both developed and developing nations, educators who implement media literacy programs are largely self-taught, with no formal educational training in this area. These individuals may have read books about media studies or media literacy; perhaps they have taught themselves how to use software for the design and production of multimedia. In most countries, neither classroom teachers nor youth service workers receive any basic initiation in

media analysis or media production practices and most rely on their own background knowledge, independent study, and interest in the topic (Hobbs, 2007a).

There are several methods used in foreign countries to improve the media literacy of schoolchildren, including:

- Introducing media literacy as a separate independent subject in school education;
- Improving the media literacy of students through various optional classes or training sessions;
- Incorporating and teaching media literacy competencies in other disciplines.

Pointing to the importance of activating students' prior knowledge, teachers report that learning motivation and achievement are increased when media literacy is discussed with adolescents (Hobbs, 2007b).

Many scholars have conducted research on the development of media literacy and media education in Central Asia.

Fedorov and Levitskaya (2018) analysed the development of mass media education in the CIS countries. Thereat, the authors believes that the CIS countries should not build the development of mass media education of their citizens based on confrontation and ideological propaganda.

Researcher Chelysheva (2019) analysed the development and current state of media literacy education in a number of Central Asian countries (Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan). The author analysed the goals and objectives, key concepts, structure, content, main stages of development, models of mass media education in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan, scientific works, and practical experience in the field of media literacy education in the countries of Central Asia in the post-soviet period. The author considers the priority technologies of modern mass media education; systematization of the material under study was carried out, the main theoretical concepts of mass media education were identified, and key trends in further development were also identified.

In the *Report on the Results of the Study of the Level of Media Literacy in the Kyrgyz Republic* (a survey of the population over 16 in the Kyrgyz Republic was conducted from September 1st to November 30th, 2017, 1200 urban and rural respondents from seven regions were interviewed) states that in Kyrgyzstan the topic of media literacy is relevant and challenging. The existing activities to increase the level of media literacy as a skill and the development of media literacy as a science are both at a rudimentary stage (Eshenalieva et al., 2018).

Akhmetova with a team of authors published the collective monographs *Mediaobrazovanie v Kazahstane* [*Media Education in Kazakhstan*] (2013), *Mediaobrazovanie i mediagramotnost': Teorija, metodologija, praktika* [*Media Education and Media Literacy: Theory, Methodology, Practice*] (2015), *Medijnaja i informacionnaja gramotnost': Konceptual'nye i metodologičeskie osnovanija* [*Media and Information Literacy: Conceptual and Methodological Foundations*] (2017), which take into account the current UNESCO recommendations on the synthesis of information and media competence of the individual.

Therefore, it is no coincidence that one of the trends in the development of media education in the CIS countries is the actualization of the development of mass forms and methods of media education activities of the population of different age and social groups (Chelysheva, 2018).

The problems of media literacy education development in Uzbekistan are being studied by many researchers. In recent decades, with UNESCO's support, several major media literacy education projects have been implemented in Central Asian countries. Their results are reflected in textbooks, dissertations, and scientific articles. For example, if we talk about media literacy education in Uzbekistan, one of the key textbooks is *Uzbekistan na puti razvitija mediaobrazovanija* [*Uzbekistan on the Way of Media Education Development*] (Mamatova & Sulaimanova, 2015), where MIL is viewed as a tool of democracy, including all media resources (media, libraries, archives, etc.).

The works of these researchers consider the process of development of an integrated media education approach in the study of several academic disciplines that were born in the wake of the creation of educational films, and have been further developed at the present stage, proving the effectiveness of integration of media literacy education not only in achieving the learning objectives of the material, but also in the development of information and communication competence.

Among the main challenges facing media literacy education in Central Asian countries, Ablazov (2013) singled out problems associated with the expansion of the media field of modern society, increasing the level of media security of the younger generation.

This research includes the study of scientific resources in English, Russian and Uzbek, monitoring the activities of organizations engaged in teaching and promoting media literacy in Central Asia, and the analysis of relevant news on their websites. The monitoring identified and analysed several projects designed for schoolchildren and organized with the help of foreign donors. The scientific novelty of this research is determined by the comparative study of the work carried out on the introduction of MIL to the school education system in Central Asia in recent years, the role of foreign aid in this regard, and suggestions and conclusions put forward in accordance with the requirements of the time.

3 Methodology

This research article aims to explore the main issues of implementing MIL in school education in Central Asian countries. To achieve this goal, a mixed methods approach will be employed, combining qualitative research techniques.

The author conducted a comprehensive review and analysis of relevant scholarly articles, books, reports, and policy documents related to MIL education in Central Asian countries, alongside existing literature, to identify key issues, challenges, and best practices in implementing MIL in school education in Central Asia.

During the research the author of the article organized and interpreted survey data to identify trends, patterns, and correlations related to MIL implementation in Central Asian countries, and tried to apply thematic coding and content analysis to identify key issues, challenges, and recommendations for improving MIL in Central Asian school education.

While writing this article the researcher performed qualitative analysis of open-ended survey responses and extracted meaningful themes and insights.

An in-depth interview was chosen as one of the main methods used in the research. Overall, 16 interviews were held in various forms and formats with funds, NGOs, project managers and media trainers working directly with projects and grants from the three countries of Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan.

Conducting in-depth interviews, coding, and thematically analysing the responses were guided by the principles outlined in *Conducting In-Depth Interviews: A Guide for Designing and Conducting In-Depth Interviews for Evaluation Input* by Boyce and Neale (2006).

Ethical guidelines were meticulously adhered to throughout the research process to safeguard the confidentiality and anonymity of participants. Informed consent was diligently obtained from all participants before their involvement in the study, and their prerogative to withdraw from the study at any point was unequivocally respected.

The number of experts whose opinion was studied directly in the in-depth interviews is reflected in the following table (Table 1):

#	Experts / Interviewees	Number	Coding
1.	Program Director – Media Support Centre Foundation (Kyrgyzstan)	1	R1
2.	Project coordinators, project assistants and media trainers (Kyrgyzstan)	4	R2 – R5
3.	Regional Media Literacy Adviser of Internews in Kazakhstan	1	R6
4.	Project coordinators, project assistants and media trainers (Kazakhstan)	2	R7 – R8
5.	Co-founder and Deputy Director of the NGO Centre for the Development of Modern Journalism, Uzbekistan	1	R9
6.	Director, NGO New Media Education Centre (Uzbekistan)	1	R10
7.	Project coordinators, project assistants and media trainers (Uzbekistan)	6	R11 – R16

TABLE 1: *Experts conducted in-depth interviews*
Source: own processing, 2024

The combination of qualitative data from interviews and a thorough review of literature forms the foundation of this research, enabling a nuanced analysis of the main issues hindering effective MIL education in the region. Through this methodological approach, this paper strives to contribute valuable insights and recommendations for enhancing MIL initiatives within the educational landscapes of Central Asian countries.

4 Analysis and Results

4.1 The Analysis and Results of the In-Depth Interviews

During the research, in-depth interviews were conducted with 16 MIL experts and media trainers from Central Asia. Interviews were organized in the formats of email and mobile phone communication, plus face-to-face conversation. In the interviews, respondents were asked "How would you define MIL?", "What competencies does MIL play in the formation of individuals?", "How do you rate the significance of implementing MIL in Central Asia?", "What are your suggestions and recommendations for improving the efficiency of MIL projects?"

Several MIL trainers and experts from Central Asia provided insightful perspectives on the significance of implementing MIL in the region:

One of the respondents (R14) emphasized the importance of media literacy initiatives, citing the establishment of "Media Literacy Houses" in Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. These initiatives cater to various segments of the population, demonstrating the relevance of MIL across different societal roles and age groups. "These media initiatives are serving the population in the direction of media literacy to the best of their ability. For example, 'Media Literacy Houses' have been established in Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, where people of different ages are taught the effective aspects of using the media (for example, how to use the technological capabilities of smartphones for the elderly, how to earn income by recommending cooking products to housewives through an online store). This practice shows that MIL is important to different representatives of the population, no matter who they are – a cook, a housewife, a driver or a scientist" (R14).

Another interviewer (R11) highlighted the existence of small-scale projects for media literacy development but criticizes the lack of methodological support and competent management from the Ministry of Education. This indicates a gap in the institutional framework necessary for the effective integration of MIL into education systems.

The next respondent (R12) suggested practical measures to broaden the scope of MIL, such as increasing the availability of interactive mobile games tailored to the local audience, expanding MIL initiatives in educational institutions like kindergartens and schools, and promoting educational manuals and scientific research in the field.

"In order to widen the field of MIL, I would recommend increasing the number of interactive, mobile games for different ages, adapting them to the Uzbek segment, and widening them in kindergartens and schools. Also, it is desirable to increase special games, activities, and training for adults. Creation and popularization of educational manuals, increase of scientific research works and other initiatives" (R12).

One respondent (R13) advocated for the inclusion of MIL as a core subject in preschool, secondary, and higher education curricula, highlighting the importance of starting MIL education at an early age and integrating it throughout the educational journey. While another media trainer (R15) recommends a holistic approach to MIL education, emphasizing the need for collaboration with schools, continuous training, practical exercises across all grade levels, leveraging online platforms for outreach, and establishing MIL clubs within communities to foster ongoing development.

"MIL should be taught from childhood. For this, it is necessary to establish cooperation with schools, conduct continuous training and practical exercises among students from the 1st to the 11th grade, make presentations on social networks using various online platforms, and open clubs that help to develop MIL separately in the neighbourhoods" (R15).

Overall, these responses underscore the multifaceted importance of MIL in Central Asia, ranging from its practical applications in everyday life to its critical role in educational and societal development. They also highlight the need for comprehensive strategies and institutional support to effectively implement MIL initiatives across the region.

The analysis of the in-depth interviews revealed several key themes and perspectives regarding the integration of MIL into the school curriculum in Central Asian countries:

1. Importance of MIL in education: The experts unanimously emphasized the crucial role of MIL in the education system. One expert (R1) stated, "MIL is essential for equipping students with the skills to critically analyse and evaluate media content in today's digital age".
2. Challenges and barriers: The analysis also brought to light the challenges and barriers faced in integrating MIL into the school curriculum. A media trainer (R13) expressed, "One of the major challenges is the lack of resources and trained educators to effectively implement MIL programs in schools".
3. Cultural relevance: The interviews highlighted the significance of considering cultural relevance in designing MIL curriculum. An expert (R2) remarked, "It's essential to tailor MIL initiatives to the cultural context of Central Asian countries to ensure its effectiveness and resonance with students".
4. Collaboration and training: Collaboration between educational institutions and media organizations emerged as a crucial factor in the successful integration of MIL. Furthermore, the need for comprehensive training programs for educators to adeptly teach MIL was emphasized.

The results of the in-depth interviews with media trainers and MIL experts underscore the following key findings:

1. Support for integration: The majority of experts expressed strong support for the integration of MIL into the school curriculum, citing its potential to empower students and enhance their critical thinking abilities.
2. Call for policy implementation: There was a consensus among the interviewees regarding the need for policy-level implementation to ensure the effective integration of MIL into the education system. One expert (R16) emphasized, "Government support and policy frameworks are essential to drive the successful adoption of MIL in schools".
3. Empowerment of students: The results indicated a shared belief in the transformative impact of MIL on students, enabling them to navigate the complex media landscape and become discerning consumers and creators of media content.

4. Continued advocacy: The interviews revealed a collective call for continued advocacy and awareness campaigns to highlight the importance of MIL and garner support for its integration into the school curriculum.

In conclusion, the analysis and results of the in-depth interviews with media trainers and MIL experts provide valuable insights into the perspectives, challenges, and recommendations concerning the integration of MIL into the school curriculum in Central Asian countries. These findings serve as a foundation for further research and policy initiatives aimed at advancing MIL education in the region.

4.2 Survey Results

4.2.1 The Key Points About the MIL Curriculum in Kyrgyzstan

MIL education has been developing in Kyrgyzstan, with initiatives by organizations like the Media Support Center Foundation and the Media Sabak Foundation (Chelysheva, 2019; UNESCO, 2021; Deutsche Welle, 2022).

The MIL curriculum in Kyrgyzstan focuses on developing critical thinking skills to verify information from different sources, analyse media content, and understand concepts like propaganda, stereotypes, and fact-checking (Deutsche Welle, 2022; Zach, 2023).

MIL training is a mandatory curriculum component for 7th grade high school students in Kyrgyzstan, and all Kyrgyz teachers are trained in the subject (Deutsche Welle, 2022).

There are also efforts to integrate MIL into Islamic universities (madrassas) in Kyrgyzstan in 2022 – 2023. The Media Sabak Foundation offered MIL classes for 71 students at Kyrgyzstan's Islamic universities (madrassas), teaching them to critically analyse both news reports and Islamic teachings (Zach, 2023).

However, challenges remain in terms of lack of funding to train teachers and provide equipment, as well as the need for a more dedicated MIL curriculum in schools and universities (Chelysheva, 2019; UNESCO, 2023).

According to Chelysheva in Kyrgyzstan, despite the development of MIL education, the inclusion of media education in educational programs at all levels remains an open question (2019).

For 18 years, the Media Support Centre Foundation in Kyrgyzstan has continued to actively promote MIL at the country and Central Asian levels. Now it can be admitted that it is the leading organization in this field in Central Asia. As Chelysheva admitted "Kyrgyzstan has the strongest position in terms of practical accents in mastering media literacy" (2019, p. 7).

The Foundation has been implementing several MIL projects, including the project "MediaSabak: Development of Media and Information Literacy in the School System of the Kyrgyz Republic", implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Science of the Kyrgyz Republic and the Kyrgyz Academy of Education.

Within the framework of the project, the resource book on MIL for teachers was developed and recommended by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Kyrgyz Republic. The book was published and distributed to all schools in the Kyrgyz Republic. Also, the Foundation has developed a multilingual educational (Russian, Kyrgyz, Tajik, and Kazakh) portal www. mediasabak.org, which consists of animation and video lessons, practical exercises, multiple choice questions and literature on MIL. The training site is constantly updated with MIL content.

The Media Support Centre Foundation will continue to support the development of critical thinking, competent consumption of information in Kyrgyzstan through teaching the basics of media information literacy to teachers and students. It is also planned to create a network of media literate schoolteachers.

Another project "MediaSabak" includes lessons on MIL for grades 9-11 and digital literacy for grades 5-6, a program "People and Society" with an MIL component for grades 7, a resource book for a teacher and much more. As part of the BRYCA project, the online training platform www.mediasabak.org is being supplemented, and multimedia lessons can be found on MIL in Russian, Kyrgyz, Kazakh, Tajik and Uzbek.

In addition, the Foundation organized Media Laboratories for schoolteachers, a summer camp for Democracy and MIL for high school students from all regions of the country, and in 2019, for the first time, a national competition was held for the best design of lessons with MIL elements among schoolteachers.

So, in summary, the MIL curriculum in Kyrgyzstan aims to develop critical thinking, media analysis, and information verification skills among students, teachers, and the general public, though more work is needed to fully integrate it into the education system.

4.2.2 Attempts at Integrating MIL into the School Curriculum in Kazakhstan

The first textbook on MIL for schoolchildren in Kazakhstan was approved by the state expert commission and recommended for use in educational institutions.

According to the expertise of the Republican Scientific and Practical Center "Textbook" under the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the educational and methodological manual on MIL, developed in the Internews project by the International Center for Journalism MediaNet with the support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), is recommended for use in educational institutions of Kazakhstan. The content of the textbook corresponds to modern scientific ideas about the media and media sphere – from the official conclusion of the Center "Uchebnik" (Khodoreva, 2021).

A team of experts from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Ukraine, and Lithuania has developed a textbook for students in grades 9-11 (12), as well as a methodological guide for schoolteachers in Kazakh and Russian. They are both available in electronic format on the Internet. Students will master the concepts of media literacy, critical thinking skills, recognition of fakes and manipulations, and learn how to safely use the Internet. Recall that in the United States, Europe and many other countries, MIL is a compulsory component of secondary education.

In 2019, the textbook for schoolchildren was tested in schools in Kazakhstan, and in 2020 it was revised in accordance with the state education standard of the Republic of Kazakhstan and supplemented with a methodological guide for teachers.

This educational and methodological complex was prepared by the Public Foundation "International Center for Journalism MediaNet" in the framework of the Central Asian program MediaCAMP, implemented by Internews with financial support USAID.

4.2.3 Attempts at Integrating MIL into the School Curriculum in Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan has been actively working to integrate MIL into its school curriculum in recent years. Uzbekistan has recognized the importance of MIL education and has taken steps to incorporate it into the national curriculum (Chelysheva, 2019). The country has developed a national curriculum framework that emphasizes the development of critical thinking, creativity, and digital literacy skills among students (MoPSE, 2021).

Key efforts include:
- Involving teachers, professors, and education experts in the development of the new national curriculum, which includes a focus on MIL competencies such as critical thinking, information evaluation, and media production (MoPSE, 2021);
- Aligning the curriculum with international MIL frameworks and standards, such as the UNESCO MIL Curriculum for Teachers, to ensure a comprehensive and up-to-date approach (Muratova et al., 2019);
- Providing training and professional development for teachers to equip them with the knowledge and skills to effectively teach MIL in the classroom (Chelysheva, 2019);

- Collaborating with international organizations like UNICEF and USAID to access technical expertise and resources for MIL curriculum development and implementation (UNICEF, 2023).

Overall, Uzbekistan is making significant strides in integrating MIL into its national education system in order to provide students with the critical 21st century skills needed to navigate the digital information landscape. The country's focus on teacher training and aligning with global MIL frameworks suggests a commitment to delivering high-quality, impactful MIL education.

In Uzbekistan, the partners of the project "Centre for the Development of Contemporary Journalism" are currently working on the development of media literacy. Since 2015, the UNESCO office, as well as a number of international organizations, have also been working in this area. Although MIL has not yet been introduced into the system of preschool, school and higher education, the first steps have already been taken in the field of education for journalists – training is carried out, certain topics such as critical thinking, the concept of stereotypes and fact-checking are included in the curriculum.

There were good projects in Uzbekistan as well. Recognized projects for journalism, posters, and MIL classes for schoolchildren.

According to Saida Sulaimonova, director of the Center for the Development of Modern Journalism in the Republic of Uzbekistan, media educator and media expert, from the point of view of press and information literacy, Uzbekistan is learning from the experience of neighbouring countries, and MIL in our country is not yet included in the education system. We are currently in the initial stages of this process, but it is highly active and encouraged by government agencies (Pastukhova, 2021). The organization represented by the authors is actively involved in this process, and a number of projects on this topic are being implemented. The BRYCA project aims to increase youth MIL through gaming technology (the "Qlever" educational game platform is being developed, through which youth can increase their critical thinking and media literacy).

"DW_MIL.UZ" project is also dedicated to the introduction of media literacy in the education system of Uzbekistan. "Legal Clinic" and other projects are aimed at developing legal literacy among journalists, bloggers, and journalists (Pastukhova, 2021).

The goal of the "DW_MIL.UZ" project is the phased introduction of MIL as a separate independent discipline in the education system of Uzbekistan at all its levels. In the first year, the project stakeholders will be trained – representatives of state authorities, on which decisions related to the goals and objectives of the project depend. In addition, a preliminary study will be carried out to determine the baseline level of MIL among teachers and students at pilot schools in Tashkent city and the Tashkent region. Based on the research results, a training program for the MIL group will be developed from among the teachers at the pilot schools ("Pjat' voprosov o proekte DW_MIL.UZ" ["Five questions about the DW_MIL.UZ project"], 2021).

4.2.4 The Best Practices for Implementing MIL in School Education in Central Asian Countries

Some successful examples of MIL education programs in Central Asian countries include:
In Kyrgyzstan:
- The MIL curriculum developed by the "Promoting media plurality, balance and media literacy in Central Asia" project has been accepted by the Ministry of Education in Kyrgyzstan and is now taught in schools across the country (ERIM, 2019);
- 322 schoolteachers in Kyrgyzstan participated in MIL training of trainers' workshops as part of this project (ERIM, 2019).

In Kazakhstan:
- Internews in Kazakhstan has conducted research on the low media literacy levels in the country and the vulnerability of the population to Russian propaganda, especially during the Russia-Ukraine conflict (Cabar.asia, 2022);

- Activists in Kazakhstan have demanded the government shut down the broadcasting of Russian state TV channels, highlighting the need for independent tools to counter propaganda (Cabar.asia, 2022).

Regionally:

- ERIM (Equal Rights and Independent Media) has worked across Central Asia, including in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, to develop MIL training manuals and provide training to educators (ERIM, 2019);
- UNESCO has supported several large-scale MIL projects in the region, including surveys and the development of methodological tools (Dadakhonov, 2024);
- "Media Literacy Houses" have been established in Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, and today they are promoting MIL training courses and other useful initiatives for school-aged students among representatives of different ages (Xabar, 2022).

These examples demonstrate that while MIL education efforts in Central Asia are still relatively new, there are promising initiatives underway to integrate MIL into school curricula and train educators across the region.

Based on the results of the study, the best practices for implementing MIL in school education in Central Asian countries are summarized in the following table (Table 2):

#	The best practices	Evidence from sources
1	**Developing MIL Curricula and Teaching Materials**	Developing comprehensive MIL training manuals and teaching materials for schools, universities, and librarians in local languages (Russian, Kyrgyz, Kazakh, Tajik) (ERIM, 2019).
		Integrating the MIL curriculum into the national education system, as has been done in Kyrgyzstan where the MIL curriculum is now taught in schools (ERIM, 2019).
2	**Training Educators**	Providing MIL training via trainers' workshops for high school teachers, university professors, and librarians to equip them with the skills to teach MIL (ERIM, 2019).
		Building a pool of trained MIL educators who can then cascade the training to more teachers (ERIM, 2019).
3	**Raising Awareness and Engagement**	Developing online MIL tools and resources in local languages to reach a wider audience (ERIM, 2019).
		Engaging with government officials to gain support and commitment for scaling up MIL education (Cabar.asia, 2022).
		Supporting local independent media to strengthen the information landscape (Cabar.asia, 2022).
4	**Measuring Impact**	Conducting cross-country studies to measure the media literacy levels in the region and track progress over time (Zadorin et al., 2023).

TABLE 2: *The best practices for implementing MIL in school education in Central Asian countries*
Source: own processing, 2024

The key is a comprehensive, multi-stakeholder approach that develops MIL curricula, trains educators, raises public awareness, and measures impact – all with strong government support and commitment.

4.2.5 Issues of Measuring the Efficiency of MIL Projects in the Region

Based on the analysis of the reported documents of various stakeholders, it can be said that successful MIL education programs in Central Asian countries measure their success through various key indicators. These indicators were summarized in the following table (Table 3).

#	Key indicators	Explanation
1.	Curriculum Integration	The successful integration of MIL curricula into the national education systems, as has been done in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan where the MIL curriculum is now taught in schools.
2.	Educator Training	The number of educators, including schoolteachers, university professors, and librarians, who have received MIL training and are equipped to teach MIL skills
3.	Reach and Engagement	The development of online MIL tools and resources in local languages to reach a wider audience. The level of engagement and support from government officials for scaling up MIL education.
4.	Impact on Media Literacy Levels	Assessments of the population's vulnerability to misinformation, propaganda, and disinformation, especially during international conflicts and in various emergency situations. Cross-country studies by several foreign aid project holders that measure the media literacy levels in the region and track progress over time.

TABLE 3: *Key indicators of successful MIL education programs in Central Asian countries*
Source: own processing, 2024

The key is to have a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework that looks at both the implementation of MIL programs (curriculum, training, resources) as well as the actual impact on improving media literacy levels across the Central Asian countries.

Sustained commitment from policymakers and governments is crucial for these MIL education initiatives to be successful and scalable in the long run.

4.2.6 Overview of the Findings

Studies and analyses have shown that the development of media literacy in the secondary school system in Central Asian countries is in its infancy. So far, the following work has been done in this regard:

- Training sessions for schoolteachers were organized by several national organizations with the help of international donors;
- In Central Asia, mainly in Kyrgyzstan, practical work has been done to introduce media literacy in school education. Textbooks have been published; a special website has been created. Kazakhstan has developed a textbook for high schools and is about to introduce it in school education. In Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, training courses in this field were organized by participants and grant holders in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan;
- To improve the media literacy of schoolchildren in Uzbekistan, there is a need to introduce this subject in secondary schools.

In Central Asia, the formation of MIL competencies in schoolchildren is largely at the expense of foreign donors. As a result, training was initially provided. In the case of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, significant work has been done in this regard.

Efforts have been made to determine the level of MIL of school-age children based on many important criteria, such as bullying on social networks, the channels through which they receive daily news, and their ability to sort and analyse the flow of information.

5 Discussion

5.1 The Difference Between the MIL Education Programs of Central Asian Countries and Those in Other Regions

There are a few key differences between MIL education programs in Central Asian countries compared to other regions:

1. Slower development: Some researchers indicated that while media education is well-developed in many Western countries, it is still relatively young and maturing across Asian societies, including Central Asia. This is likely due to the later adoption of digital media and the internet in these regions (Tibaldo, 2022).

2. Western influence: The initial media education approaches in Central Asian countries, as well as other parts of Asia, were heavily influenced by Western models and pedagogies, such as the protectionist approach. Experts from Western countries like Canada and the UK have played prominent roles in shaping media education in Asia (Tibaldo, 2022).

3. Integration into existing curricula: Similar to Western countries, MIL education in some Central Asian nations like Uzbekistan is integrated into existing subjects like the English curriculum, rather than being a standalone course.

4. Challenges with infrastructure and resources: The search results suggest that Central Asian countries face more significant challenges in terms of the economic and technological infrastructure to support independent media and robust media literacy education, compared to more developed regions. Lack of funding and access to quality journalism education can be considered as the crucial barriers.

In summary, the search results highlight that MIL education in Central Asia is still emerging and faces unique contextual challenges compared to more established programs in other parts of the world.

5.2 The Lack of MIL Affects the Education System in Central Asian Countries

Timotheou et al. (2023) discuss the issue of "Impacts of digital technologies on equality, inclusion and social integration" in their research and wrote the following opinion: "Although most of the reviewed studies focused on the impact of ICTs on students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes, reports were also made on other aspects in the school context, such as equality, inclusion, and social integration" (Timotheou et al., 2023, p. 6702).

The deficiency in MIL within the education systems of Central Asian countries poses significant challenges. Without adequate MIL skills, students may struggle to critically evaluate information, discern fact from fiction, and navigate the digital landscape effectively. This deficiency hampers their ability to engage with diverse perspectives, undermines their capacity for informed decision-making, and leaves them vulnerable to misinformation and manipulation. Consequently, it undermines the overall quality of education and fails to prepare students for the complexities of the modern world.

The lack of effective MIL education in Central Asian countries has several negative impacts on their education systems:

1. Vulnerability to disinformation and propaganda: Without critical media literacy skills, students remain susceptible to false narratives, especially during times of geopolitical tensions. This can undermine their ability to think critically and engage meaningfully with information (Cabar.asia, 2022; Dadakhonov, 2024; Zadorin et al., 2023).

2. Polarization and conflict within schools: The absence of MIL has led to students living in "different information bubbles" and taking hardline stances on issues without understanding diverse perspectives, raising the risk of conflicts within the education community (Baú, 2023).
3. Undermining of civic education and engagement: Poor MIL hinders students' capacity to access reliable information, participate in public discourse, and develop the skills needed for active citizenship and democratic participation (ERIM, 2019; Zadorin et al., 2023).
4. Lack of localized teaching resources and curriculum: The dearth of MIL curricula and materials in local languages limits the ability of teachers to effectively integrate media literacy into their instruction across the region (Cabar.asia, 2022; ERIM, 2019).
5. Insufficient teacher training and support. The limited availability of systematic professional development for educators teaching MIL constrains the education system's capacity to deliver quality media literacy education (ERIM, 2019; Deutsche Welle, 2022).

In summary, the absence of comprehensive, government-supported MIL programs in Central Asian schools perpetuates students' vulnerability to manipulation, inhibits their civic engagement, and undermines the overall quality and relevance of the education system in the digital age.

5.3 The Challenges of Implementing MIL in School Education in Central Asian Countries

Implementing media and information literacy (MIL) in school education in Central Asian countries faces various challenges. These may include a lack of resources such as trained educators, suitable curriculum materials, and technological infrastructure. Additionally, cultural and linguistic diversity within the region can present obstacles to developing standardized MIL programs that address the needs of all students. Furthermore, limited awareness and prioritization of MIL by educational policymakers and stakeholders may hinder efforts to integrate it effectively into the curriculum. Overcoming these challenges requires comprehensive strategies that encompass teacher training, curriculum development, and community engagement to promote MIL skills and foster critical thinking among students.

The key challenges to implementing media and information literacy (MIL) in school education across Central Asian countries have been identified through research by numerous scientists and stakeholder reports:

1. Low baseline of media literacy among the general population: Experts have noted a lack of critical thinking and vulnerability to false information, propaganda, and disinformation, especially during COVID -2019, and international conflicts (Chelysheva, 2019).
2. Lack of MIL curriculum and teaching materials in local languages: While some MIL training manuals have been developed in Russian, Kyrgyz, Kazakh and Tajik (ERIM, 2019), more comprehensive curriculum and resources are still needed across the region.
3. Limited integration of MIL into national education systems: Although Kyrgyzstan has accepted an MIL curriculum into its national school system (ERIM, 2019), most Central Asian countries have not yet fully incorporated MIL into their standard school curricula (Chelysheva, 2019).
4. Insufficient training and support for teachers to effectively teach MIL: While some training of educators has occurred, more systematic and widespread professional development is required to build a cadre of teachers capable of delivering quality MIL instruction (Dadakhonov, 2024; Deutsche Welle, 2022).
5. Lack of long-term, sustainable funding and government support for MIL programs: Many current MIL initiatives in the region rely on foreign donor funding, which raises questions about their long-term viability and integration into national education priorities (Dadakhonov, 2024; Cabar.asia, 2022).

To sum up, the key challenges are the low baseline of MIL, limited localized teaching resources, incomplete integration into national education systems, inadequate teacher training, and unsustainable funding models.

5.4 The Potential Consequences of not Implementing MIL in School Education in Central Asian Countries

The failure to implement MIL in school education in Central Asian countries can lead to detrimental consequences. Without MIL skills, students are vulnerable to misinformation, propaganda, and manipulation, which can undermine their ability to make informed decisions and participate effectively in society. This can perpetuate social divisions, hinder democratic processes, and impede economic development. Furthermore, the lack of MIL can exacerbate existing challenges such as digital inequality and cultural erosion. Overall, neglecting MIL education deprives students of essential tools for navigating the complexities of the information age, hindering their personal growth and the progress of their communities. Without critical media literacy skills, the population remains susceptible to false narratives, especially during times of geopolitical tensions and conflicts like the Russia-Ukraine war (Cabar.asia, 2022; Zadorin et al., 2023; Dadakhonov, 2024).

The lack of MIL has led to people living in "different information bubbles" and choosing sides on issues without hearing each other out, raising the risk of open conflict within communities and countries (Cabar.asia, 2022; Zadorin et al., 2023).

Poor media literacy can hinder citizens' ability to access reliable information, think critically, and participate meaningfully in public discourse and decision-making (Cabar.asia, 2022).

MIL is crucial for navigating the modern information landscape and developing the skills needed for the digital economy and society. Neglecting it can limit opportunities for progress (Dadakhonov, 2024).

Continued reliance on foreign-funded MIL initiatives rather than sustainable, government-supported programs is also one of the important issues in this case. The current donor-driven model raises questions about the long-term viability and national ownership of media literacy efforts (Cabar.asia, 2022; Dadakhonov, 2024).

In summary, the failure to systematically implement MIL education in Central Asian schools could perpetuate the region's vulnerability to misinformation, deepen social divisions, undermine democratic participation, and constrain overall development, unless concerted action is taken.

5.5 Recommendations for Future Action

Moving forward, it is imperative that Central Asian countries prioritize MIL as a fundamental component of their educational systems. Policymakers should develop and enforce regulations that support MIL integration and encourage cross-border collaboration to share resources and expertise. Teacher training programs should be expanded to equip educators with the necessary skills to impart MIL effectively.

The implementation of MIL in Central Asian school education is a complex endeavour with its own unique challenges and opportunities. Despite these challenges, the region has seen promising initiatives that can serve as models for others. By addressing linguistic diversity, digital access, and fostering international cooperation, Central Asian countries can make significant strides in nurturing a digitally literate and informed citizenry.

Implementing MIL in the school education system of Central Asian countries requires a thoughtful and strategic approach. The following table shows some optimal ways (Table 4):

#	Way of implementing	Explanation
1.	**Curriculum Integration**	Integrate MIL into the national curriculum as a core subject, ensuring that it is taught at all educational levels. Develop age-appropriate content and learning materials that align with local cultures and languages.
2.	**Teacher Training**	Provide comprehensive training for teachers on MIL concepts and pedagogical techniques. Encourage ongoing professional development to keep educators updated on the evolving media landscape.
3.	**Digital Infrastructure**	Invest in digital infrastructure, including internet access and devices, to bridge the digital divide and ensure equitable access to MIL education, especially in remote areas.
4.	**International Collaboration**	Collaborate with international organizations, such as UNESCO, to access resources, share best practices, and learn from global experiences.
5.	**Public Awareness**	Launch awareness campaigns for parents and communities to emphasize the importance of MIL in the digital age and their role in supporting children's education.
6.	**Media Literacy Projects**	Support and fund media literacy projects, including partnerships with media organizations, to provide real-world context and experiences.
7.	**Assessment and Evaluation**	Develop standardized assessments to measure MIL competencies and evaluate the effectiveness of MIL programs.
8.	**Research and Data Collection**	Encourage research on MIL to better understand local challenges and develop evidence-based strategies.
9.	**Cross-Disciplinary Approach**	Promote the integration of MIL concepts across various subjects, not limited to media studies, to emphasize its importance in critical thinking and decision-making.
10.	**Civic Engagement**	Incorporate lessons on responsible digital citizenship, media ethics, and the role of information in a democratic society.
11.	**Local Content Creation**	Encourage students to create their own media content, fostering critical thinking and creativity in the digital realm
12.	**Partnerships with Tech Companies**	Collaborate with technology companies to develop tools and resources that facilitate MIL education, including fact-checking tools and platforms for responsible content sharing.
13.	**Policy Development**	Create and enforce policies that support MIL integration and establish a regulatory framework to address misinformation and disinformation
14.	**Feedback Mechanisms**	Establish channels for feedback from educators, students, and parents to continuously improve MIL programs
15.	**Inclusivity**	Ensure that MIL programs are inclusive, catering to the needs of diverse groups, including children with disabilities and those from marginalized communities.
16.	**Measuring Impact**	Regularly assess the impact of MIL education on students' ability to critically evaluate and use media and information
17.	**Long-Term Commitment**	Recognize that MIL is an ongoing skill, and commit to its integration as a long-term educational goal

TABLE 4: *Ways of implementing MIL in the school education system*
Source: own processing, 2024

By following these strategies, Central Asian countries can effectively implement MIL into their education systems, fostering digitally literate and responsible citizens capable of navigating the complex media landscape of the 21st century.

6 Conclusion

The main issues in implementing MIL in school education in Central Asian countries are as follows:
- The low overall level of MIL among the population in Central Asia – during the interviews, the MIL experts noted a lack of critical thinking and vulnerability to false information, propaganda, and disinformation, especially during different conflicts in international arena. This highlights the need to improve MIL education.
- Lack of MIL curriculum and teaching materials in local languages – while some MIL training manuals have been developed in Russian, Kyrgyz, Kazakh and Tajik, more comprehensive curriculum and resources are still needed across the region.
- Limited integration of MIL into national education systems – although Kyrgyzstan has accepted an MIL curriculum into its national school system, most Central Asian countries have not yet fully incorporated MIL into their standard school curricula.
- Insufficient training and support for teachers to effectively teach MIL – while some training of educators has occurred, more systematic and widespread professional development is required to build a cadre of teachers capable of delivering quality MIL instruction.
- Lack of long-term, sustainable funding and government support for MIL programs – many current MIL initiatives in the region rely on foreign donor funding, which raises questions about their long-term viability and integration into national education priorities.
- In summary, the key challenges are the low baseline of MIL, limited localized teaching resources, incomplete integration into national education systems, inadequate teacher training, and unsustainable funding models.
- MIL and media education are extremely important areas in today's information age. They teach people to keep up with the times and technology. Therefore, it is observed in the world that it is taught to people of all ages. As a result of our research and observations, we have reached the following conclusions:
- Extensive experience in the development of MIL and its introduction into the education system in countries around the world, in particular in the United States and Europe;
- The development of MIL in Central Asia has been based on various long-term and short-term projects and grants of some non-governmental organizations with the support of foreign donors;
- After 2015, the number of MIL projects in Central Asia has increased dramatically, and more projects are implemented every year, and this continuity is in a sense bearing fruit;
- One of the main achievements of the MIL projects is the organization of a series of trainings, first for schoolteachers, and then for schoolchildren;
- Today, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan have made great strides in introducing MIL in school education. Negotiations with the Ministries of Education have begun in Uzbekistan;
- MIL allows schoolchildren to effectively use the achievements of the time and technology, to protect against various screen bullying, attacks and threats on the Internet and social networks, to analyse media news, to develop a number of information age competencies.

In the process of conducting this research, we put forward the following recommendations:
- MIL in Central Asia should be raised to the level of long-life learning and various projects should be launched in this regard;
- MIL should be taught as a separate subject in kindergartens, schools and higher education;
- In the formation of MIL skills in school-age children, it is necessary to include topics that shape MIL skills in various subjects, information and computer technology, art, native language, and foreign languages.

6.1 Limitations

Despite the thorough methodology employed in this research, several limitations merit acknowledgment. Firstly, the study's reliance on in-depth interviews with 16 MIL experts may introduce potential biases due to the subjective nature of individual perspectives. Additionally, the sample size may not fully capture the diversity of opinions and experiences within the broader MIL education landscape of Central Asian countries.

Furthermore, while extensive literature review supplemented the empirical data, the availability and accessibility of relevant scholarly articles, books, reports, and policy documents may have been constrained, potentially limiting the depth of analysis in certain areas.

Moreover, contextual factors, such as cultural differences and political dynamics, within the Central Asian region may influence the generalizability of findings beyond the specific contexts of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan.

Finally, the dynamic nature of MIL education and evolving socio-political contexts necessitate a recognition that the issues identified in this study may continue to evolve, requiring ongoing research and evaluation to address emerging challenges and opportunities.

Despite these limitations, this research contributes valuable insights into the main issues surrounding the implementation of Media and Information Literacy in school education in Central Asian countries, serving as a foundation for future investigations and policy interventions in the field.

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