

## New Generation, New Media and Communication Rights: A View from Turkey<sup>1</sup>

### Yeni Kuşak, Yeni Medya ve İletişim Hakları: Türkiye’den Bir Görünüm

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#### Abstract

The UN Convention on Rights of the Child (1989) is one of the international legal documents dealing with the relationship between media and children, as well as children’s communication rights. Article 13/1 of the Convention declares the “right to freedom of expression” through any kind of “media of the child’s choice”, while article 17 emphasizes that “States Parties recognize the important function performed by the mass media and shall ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources”. Turkey as one of the state parties to the UNCRC, has an obligation to protect and promote children’s communication rights as set forth in the UN Convention on Rights of the Child.

In recent years, new media technologies and the internet have moved into the centre of attention, as special UN reports focused on protecting and promoting the child’s right to freedom of expression. This article aims at elaborating the ways in which children in Turkey are able to exercise their communication rights in new media environment, for this purpose, the findings of three different research at three different levels -international, national and local- will be employed to handle children’s new media usage habits in Turkey. Finally, the article concludes with some recommendations for contributing to formulate media education policies and practices sensitive to every child’s communication rights especially aligned with the UN Convention on Rights of the Child (1989), which congratulates its 25th anniversary in this year.

#### Anahtar Kelimeler:

Yeni Medya, Çocuğun İletişim Hakları, Yeni Medya Okuryazarlığı, Avrupa Çevrimiçi Çocuklar Araştırması, Türkiye’de Bilgi ve İletişim Teknolojileri Kullanımı Araştırması, MEDYAK Projesi, Birleşmiş Milletler Çocuk Hakları Sözleşmesi ve UNICEF

#### Öz

Birleşmiş Milletler Çocuk Hakları Sözleşmesi (1989), çocuğun medyayla ilişkisi yanında çocuğun iletişim haklarına da değinen uluslararası hukuk belgelerinden biridir. Sözleşmenin 13. maddesinin 1. fıkrası, çocuğun kendi seçeceği herhangi bir araçla, “düşüncesini özgürce açıklama hakkı”na sahip olduğunu ilan ederken 17. madde, “Taraflar Devletler, kitle iletişim araçlarının önemini kabul ederek çocuğun; özellikle toplumsal, ruhsal ve ahlâki esenliği ile bedensel ve zihinsel sağlığını geliştirmeye yönelik çeşitli ulusal ve uluslararası kaynaklardan bilgi ve belge edinmesini sağlarlar” demektedir. Birleşmiş Milletler Çocuk Hakları Sözleşmesi’ne taraf olan devletlerden biri olarak Türkiye de çocuk haklarını korumak ve geliştirmekle yükümlüdür.

Son yıllarda, BM bünyesinde konuya özel raporlar, çocuğun düşüncesini özgürce ifade etme hakkının korunması ve geliştirilmesi üzerinde dururken yeni medya teknolojileri ve internete dikkat çekilmektedir. Makalede, Türkiye’de çocukların, yeni medya ortamlarında iletişim haklarını kullanma yollarının incelenmesi amaçlanmaktadır ve bu amaca yönelik olarak, üç farklı düzeydeki –uluslararası, ulusal ve yerel- üç ayrı araştırmanın verilerinden yararlanılarak Türkiye’de çocukların yeni medyayı kullanma alışkanlıkları ele alınacaktır. Makale, bu yıl 25 yılını kutlayan BM Çocuk Hakları Sözleşmesi’nde (1989) sıralanan, çocuğun iletişim haklarına duyarlı medya eğitimi politika ve uygulamalarının biçimlenmesine katkı sağlayacak önerilerle son bulacaktır.

<sup>1</sup> This article is prepared by revising my presentation titled “The child, communication rights and new media: The case of Turkey” which has been selected for the panel titled “Children’s communication rights: a research assessment for the 25th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child” and this panel was moderated by Prof. Dr. Sonia Livingstone and held at the 5th European Communication Conference organized by ECREA in Lisboa, Portugal, 12-15 November 2014. For our commentaries on the 5th European Communication Conference 2014, and ECREA’s president Prof. Dr. Claudia Alvares’ special messages addressed to scholars in Turkey, see <http://sbdergi.gazi.edu.tr>

*This were to be new made when thou art old,  
And see thy blood warm when thou feel'st it cold.*

W. Shakespeare  
Sonnet II

## **Introduction**

Nowadays, studies on media usage habits of children and youth open the “new” title and media studies and discussions become concentrated under this title: New media and children...

Several studies have focused on the ways and manners of “new” media usage by the “new” generation, also called “digital age children”. Within these studies, the problems emerged alongside with the facilities provided by the media are also elaborated. Especially the digital divide, the level of access to computer, internet facility as well as the skill level of children when concerning new media, and closely related with it, educational practices such as “new media literacy”, “digital literacy”, “information literacy; beside these, some core problems like excessive usage of new media by children and youth, or cyberbullying etc. can be counted as specific issues dealt with in various studies regarding new media environment.

This article tries to elaborate the challenging conditions that face children’s communication rights in Turkey. In this respect, three recent studies provide important data on the media usage habits of children: 1) at the international level, the EU Kids Online Survey results regarding the experiences and practices of European children and their parents in relation to using the internet and mobile technologies in 25 countries, including Turkey; 2) at the national level, the Turkish Statistics Institute’s official 2013 results of a survey among 16-74 year olds on the use of communication and information technologies; and 3) at the local level, the findings of the MEDCOM (Media in Comparison) Project conducted in the capital city of Turkey, Ankara, which aims to explore and understand the positions of young audiences in secondary schools around diverse forms of the media settings from traditional to new media.

As the findings of these researches originate from three different analytical levels, i.e. the international, the national and the local, they enable the critical reflection and evaluation of government policies and practices that affect a child’s right to communicate in Turkey. Furthermore, certain recommendations will be made for making media education policies and practices sensitive to children’s communication rights specially declared in the UN Convention on Rights of the Child, which congratulates its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in this year. At that sequence let’s look at the statistics derived from an important study at the international level, concerning the situation of children in new media environment with a comparative perspective.

When considering Turkey’s country report written by Kürşat Çağiltay, within the EU Kids Online Survey, it is seen that most of the children use “the computer or a

notebook shared with other family members to access the internet”. In relation to the children’s usage habits of internet, 15% of the children reported that they first used the internet when they were ten years old. 36% of the children said that they spend around one hour daily on online activities.

52% of children in Turkey access the internet at home, this percentage is 94% for the children living in other European countries. About half of children in Turkey go to internet cafes, this is higher than the average of 12% for other European countries. In relation to the internet addiction, 25% of children in Turkey “express statements that are perceived as constituting internet addiction (“excessive use”), whereas this percentage is 32% for Europe” (Çağiltay, 2011).

In relation to the activities through the internet, children in Turkey state that they use the internet mostly for school work (93%). Small portion of children (4%) in Turkey “use the internet for communication (instant messaging, sending or receiving e-mail, visiting social network sites)”, this percentage is “60% for Europe on average”. Most of children who use social networking sites have an account on Facebook (85%). When we look at the using skills and manners, “more than half of their parents restrict children’s disclosure of their personal information”. However, nearly half of children (42%) reported that “their profile is ‘public’, which means anyone can see it whereas “one third of children” share this information only with friends. Beside these figures, 19 % of children “share their address” while 18% of children “share their phone number on the social networking site profiles” (Çağiltay, 2011).

When considering the basic skills of using internet, it is reported that “half of the children in Turkey can change privacy settings in Facebook while in Europe 77% can do it”. These children in Turkey “generally leave their privacy settings on default values”. In the report it is recommended to overcome the difficulties related with the changing privacy settings: “the Social networking sites have lengthy, confusing privacy guidelines displayed in small, crowded fonts. Simpler new methods should be developed to enable users to change privacy settings” (Çağiltay, 2011).

### **Risky Issues, New Media and Children**

In the EU Kids Online Survey, there are four categories specifying the countries position by regarding the children’s internet usage and the risks they encountered: lower use-lower risk, lower use-some risk, higher use-some risk and lastly, higher use-higher risk. Turkey is among “lower use-some risk” countries like Ireland, Portugal, Spain. It means that Turkey, like other countries are in this category, has “the lowest internet usage, although there is some excessive use of the internet and some problems with user-generated content” (Çağiltay, 2011).

The proportion of children who encountered something that bothered them on the internet is less in Turkey compared to Europe generally (10% vs. 12%). There is a considerable difference between Turkish and other European children in terms of perceived risks of the internet. 38% of children in Turkey believe that there are issues that are bothering for children on the internet while this rate is 55% on average for other European children (Çağiltay, 2011).

The digital gap regarding the gender in Turkey is also detected in the EU Kids Online Survey. Whereas 49% of fathers use the internet this percentage is 24% for mothers. In that respect, it can be said that there is important gap between digital skills of mothers and fathers. Beside this, if we consider that nearly half of children have access the internet outside, it is difficult for parents to mediate their children's internet use. According to Turkey's report in the survey, more than the half of the parents (60%) reported that they "guide their children's experience of using the internet, but 34% of parents say that they use software to prevent spam/junk mail or viruses, and others (less than one third) check or keep track of the websites visited by their children" (national report, 2012). Important percentage of children (%78) stated that they got help from their teachers "for at least one of the internet issues", while 71% of them asked for help from their friends. These rates are 83% (help from teachers) and 75% (help from friends) in Europe average (Çağiltay, 2011).

Turkish Statistical Institute (Turkstat) conducted an important survey titled "Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Usage Survey in Households and Individuals, 2004-2014". In this study, people between the age 16-74 were in the scope of the survey, but, out of the data, we especially deal with the statistics related with 16-24 age groups, which are important for the aim of this presentation as to explore and understand the positions of young audiences in new media environment.

**Table 1. Individuals using the computer and Internet by age groups (%)**

	Yıl Year	16 - 24			25 - 34		
		Toplam Total	Erkek Male	Kadın Female	Toplam Total	Erkek Male	Kadın Female
<b>Bilgisayar Computer</b>	2004	32,2	44,4	21,1	19,8	26,4	13,1
	2005	34,1	43,8	25,0	20,9	27,6	13,9
	2007	54,6	67,3	40,7	35,1	44,7	25,5
	2008	57,9	69,6	47,0	43,3	54,8	31,8
	2009	62,2	76,4	49,1	46,6	58,6	34,5
	2010	65,2	78,5	52,7	52,0	62,4	41,6
	2011	67,7	77,9	58,3	57,1	67,5	46,7
	2012	68,5	81,1	56,4	59,1	70,0	48,1
	2013	70,6	82,0	59,5	59,6	70,0	49,1
	2014	70,3	79,6	61,0	63,3	71,3	55,3
<b>İnternet Internet</b>	2004	26,6	38,3	15,9	15,7	21,5	9,9
	2005	27,8	37,4	18,8	16,7	22,5	10,6
	2007	50,4	63,5	36,2	32,3	41,5	23,1
	2008	54,8	67,1	43,4	41,4	52,3	30,4
	2009	59,4	74,1	46,0	45,1	57,2	32,9
	2010	62,9	76,6	49,9	50,6	60,9	40,2
	2011	65,8	76,5	55,9	55,1	65,4	44,9
	2012	67,7	80,6	55,4	58,5	69,6	47,2
	2013	68,7	80,1	57,5	58,8	69,1	48,4
	2014	73,0	82,8	63,2	67,1	76,8	57,4

**Source: TurkStat, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Usage Survey in Households and Individuals, 2004-2014**

When we compare the numbers of computer users aged 16-24 in the year 2004 and 2014, the percentage of the users become doubled in total. 32% of child and youth use computer in 2004 whereas this percentage is 70,3% in 2014. Digital gap between gender is also detected in this group. 44,4% of male was computer user while only 21,1% of female used computer in 2004. For the year 2014, 79,6% of male aged 16-24 and 61% of female aged 16-24 use computer. Although the percentage of female computer users

has arisen three times from 2004 to 2014 and the percentage of male computer users has arisen two times, the differences between the percentage of male users and that of female users remained same.

Regarding male and female users at all ages (16-74) between 2004 to 2014, the percentage of individuals using computer is 23-6% (31,1% of male, 16,2% of female) in 2004 while 53,5% of individuals use computer (62,7 of male, 44,3% of female). Despite the fact that the gap between male and female computer users has still existed, it becomes smaller from 2004 to 2014 (see Table 2). Digital gap between female and male is also a fact in urban area, but it is more acute problem in rural areas of the country than the urban one.

One of the remarkable point is related with the digital gap between generations (with the data of 2014): the percentage of individuals using computer.

- at the age between 16-24 is 70,3% (79,6% for male, 61% for female);
- at the age between 25-34 is 63,3 (71,3% for male, 55,3% for female),
- at the age between 35-44 is 51% (61,9% for male, 44% for female)
- at the age between 45-54 is 30,6% (40,5% for male, 20,6% for female)
- at the age between 55-64 is 15,4% (21,9% for male, 9,1% for female)
- at the age between 65-74 is only 5% (8,8% for male, 1,8% for female) (see Table 1)

When considering access to internet and the numbers of internet users aged 16-24, the percentage of individuals using internet in 2014 is nearly three times more than the percentage of individuals in 2004. 26,6% of children and youth use internet in 2004 whereas this percentage is 73% in 2014. Also there is digital gap between gender in this group. 38,3% of male was internet user while only 15,9% of female used internet in 2004. For the year 2014, 82,8% of male and 63,2% of female use internet. It is interesting to note that the percentage of computer users (male or female) of the year 2004 is slightly more than the percentage of internet users of the same year. However, this situation has changed over time and the percentage of individuals using internet become higher than the percentage of individuals using computer in 2014. Digital gap between rural areas and urban areas has still existed as well as digital gap between generations in terms of being the internet user with the number of 2014, the percentages of individuals using computer are as follows:

- at the age between 16-24 it is 73% (82,8% for male, 63,2% for female);
- at the age between 25-34 it is 67,1 (76,8% for male, 57,4% for female),
- at the age between 35-44 it is 52% (63,7% for male, 40,2% for female)
- at the age between 45-54 it is 30,4% (40,7% for male, 20% for female)
- at the age between 55-64 it is 15,3% (21,5% for male, 9,3% for female)
- at the age between 65-74 it is only 5% (8,8% for male, 1,8% for female) (see Table 2)

**Table 2. Individuals using computer and the Internet by sex (%)**

	Yıl Year	Bilgisayar - Computer			İnternet - Internet			
		Toplam Total	Erkek Male	Kadın Female	Toplam Total	Erkek Male	Kadın Female	
Türkiye Turkey	2004	23,6	31,1	16,2	18,8	25,7	12,1	
	2005	22,9	30,0	15,9	17,6	24,0	11,1	
	2007	33,4	42,7	23,7	30,1	39,2	20,7	
	2008	38,0	47,8	28,5	35,9	45,4	26,6	
	2009	40,1	50,5	30,0	38,1	48,6	28,0	
	2010	43,2	53,4	33,2	41,6	51,8	31,7	
	2011	46,4	56,1	36,9	45,0	54,9	35,3	
	2012	48,7	59,0	38,5	47,4	58,1	37,0	
	2013	49,9	60,2	39,8	48,9	59,3	38,7	
	2014	53,5	62,7	44,3	53,8	63,5	44,1	
Bilgisayar ve İnternet kullananlar Computer and Inter- net users	Kent Urban	2004	31,4	40,3	22,5	25,6	34,0	17,2
		2005	29,6	37,3	21,7	23,1	30,3	15,6
		2007	40,1	50,6	29,1	36,6	46,9	25,9
		2008	45,2	55,8	34,9	43,1	53,5	33,1
		2009	47,7	58,5	37,0	45,5	56,5	34,6
		2010	50,6	61,3	40,3	49,2	59,8	39,0
		2011	54,7	64,6	45,0	53,2	63,2	43,4
		2012	57,8	68,0	47,7	56,6	67,0	46,3
		2013	59,0	69,0	49,1	58,0	68,1	48,0
		2014	-	-	-	-	-	-
Kır Rural	2004	10,4	15,2	5,8	7,5	11,6	3,6	
	2005	11,7	17,1	6,6	8,2	12,8	3,9	
	2007	17,8	24,1	11,5	15,2	21,3	9,0	
	2008	20,6	28,4	13,1	18,3	26,0	10,9	
	2009	22,2	30,9	14,1	20,7	29,1	12,9	
	2010	25,6	34,9	16,6	23,7	33,1	14,6	
	2011	26,9	36,2	17,8	25,7	35,3	16,4	
	2012	27,6	37,8	18,0	26,4	37,1	16,3	
	2013	29,5	40,1	19,3	28,6	39,2	18,4	
	2014	-	-	-	-	-	-	

Source: TurkStat, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Usage Survey in Households and Individuals, 2004-2014

Some micro level research on the access to new media and digital skills of children and youth in Turkey, for instance, Tuğba Asrak Hasdemir et al. (2013), Mutlu Binark and Günseli Bayraktutan Sütçü (2008), Gülcan Numanoğlu ve Şafak Bayır (2012). Among them, MEDCOM Project<sup>1</sup> has been recently conducted in capital city of Turkey, in Ankara and concluded in March 2013.

In this article, child-new media relationship at the local stage is elaborated by considering the findings of the MEDYAK Project (Media in Comparison-MEDCOM) on the characteristics of the relation of children educated at the 5, 6, 7 and 8th grades of the secondary schools, with the traditional and the new media in comparative manner.

<sup>1</sup> The researchers and academicians who took active part in this Project are as follows: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tuğba Asrak Hasdemir-Director, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ruhdan Uzun-Advisor, Research Assistant Hülya Eraslan, Research Assistant Özgül Güler, Research Assistant Z. İnci Karabacak, Research Assistant Bilge Narin.

MEDCOM Project aims at exploring and understanding the position of young audiences, including the 9-12 age group of children in the secondary schools, in the diverse forms of the media settings, from traditional to new media. For this aim, a group of questions are posed on the ownership of new and old media tools among secondary education students as well as the usage patterns of these tools. In general, this study attempts to explore audience experience from the child's perspective. The Project was conducted in some secondary schools in Çankaya district in Ankara. The sample of the children educating at the 5th to 8th grades are chosen randomly; 1821 students were questioned. In the project, especially schools with diverse characteristics facilitates the comparison of the different experiences of the children as traditional and new media audiences. This Project sets out to explore the correlation between demographic characteristics like sex, forms of family, number of sibling, educational level of mother/father with the audiences' habits. The questions like "what", "when", "how often", and, "with which purposes" are asked to the young audiences. A group of questions on the content of media literacy course, especially related with the units of the course on media tools was asked to have children opinions on the issue, and to provide specific data for renewing the curriculum of media literacy course taught at the secondary education all over the country. As a whole, it is expected that the outcomes of the study with the child-right based approach, focusing on views and experiences of the children as audiences may contribute to form media policies and practices sensitive to child's rights.

According to data of MEDCOM, important number of students have computer and internet connection:

- 69,7% of the students have desktop computer;
- 71,3% of them have notebook;
- 88,2% of the students have internet connection

The question "How long you connect to the internet" is answered in a way that

- 43,3% of the students have connected to internet in a workday for 1 to 2 hours;
- 29,1% of the students have connected to internet in a workday for 3 to 4 hours;
- 1,9% of them stated that they were not interested with connecting to internet in a workday;
- 37,3 of the students have connected to internet at weekend for 3 to 4 hours;
- 2,3% of them stated that they were not interested with connecting to internet at weekend.

Related with the parents mediation, the answers of the students differ according to their grades:

- 57% of the students at the 5th grade responded that their parents put certain restrictions on usage of internet;
- 63% of them at the 6th grade responded in the same way;
- Same percentage is also valid for the 7th grade's students;
- 59% of the students at the 8th grade stated that their parents put certain restrictions on usage of internet;



- The 8th grade of the basic education is concluded by a detailed exam for entrance of high school and students are conscious, in general, about this fact and they make their work plan and put certain restrictions on the usage of internet by themselves.

Most of the students connect to internet (89%) in total, the usage rate of other medium is as follows:

- 84% for television, 61% for published books, 44% for cinema; 30% for newspaper, only 26% for radio;
- As the grade of the class become higher, the percentage of students using internet increases while the proportion of students reading newspaper and book is decreased.
- Most of the students (94%) reported that they use internet to make their homework, and in sequence, to listen music (87,3%), to play computer games (82%), to share information (32,4), to read news (31,4%) and other purposes (8,2%). As the grade of the class become higher, the percentage of students using internet to listen music and watch film relatively increases while the proportion of students playing computer game is decreased.

Another important issue is related with the account of the students in the social media environment. The percentage of the students having social media account with their own names differs in relation to the grades of the students. For 5th, 6th and 7th grades, the percentage of the students having the account with her/his own names is as follows respectively: 78,8%; 81,3%; 80%; 82,9, in total 81% of the students have an account with their names. It is important to note that important portion of the students have the account with their name as well as having an account with a nickname. Only 10% of the students have no account.

### **New media literacy, challenges and opportunities**

Three different researches, the EU Kids Online Survey's National Report on Turkey, the Turkish Statistics Institute's Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Usage Survey in Households and Individuals, 2004-2014 and MEDCOM (Media in Comparison) Project indicated that child and youth in Turkey is interested with the availabilities of new media although there are some problems related with parental mediation, risky uses, lack of digital skills etc. Responsible persons, institution should take action to overcome the difficulties came with the developments of ICT in general. There are certain problems like,

As governments promote ICT for business, commerce and communities to compete in the global economy, they are formulating national and international policies that rarely mention children's needs. In their assumptions about the needs of the labour market or householder, they often assume a competent and responsible "user" for whom providing access will suffice. There are two exceptions: the celebratory talk of "digital natives," supposedly effortlessly in the vanguard of innovative ICT uses (although see Helsper & Eynon, 2010); and efforts to redesign educational curricula and delivery to build digital skills and literacies (Livingstone & Butler, 2014:317-318).

In the child-media relationship, media literacy should not be regarded only in the context of protecting children but the aim should be making individuals more active media users. The students should learn both how to read about the media product and also

how to create their own cultural texts. On that point, Kellner (2005) suggests a transition from traditional or protective media literacy to critical media literacy.

In Turkey's case, there are some courses related with new media. Media literacy course is one of them. It can be argued that the studies and discussion on media literacy have been encouraged by the project to include media literacy course into elementary school curriculum. A pilot media literacy course has formed and included into primary school curriculum as an elective course in 2006-2007 school year in five pilot schools in accordance with "The Protocol of Cooperation" signed by "The Radio and Television Supreme Council" (RTSC) and "The Ministry of National Education-Board of Education" (MNE-BE) on media literacy course. And then the elective course on media literacy was added to the curriculum by the MNE-BE.

As an important actor in this process, RTSC explained its view on the subject at the official website. According to the information there, for the purpose of allowing audiences to access, decode, evaluate and transfer printed and non-printed messages from sources with differences formats (television, video, cinema, advertisements, internet and so on), media literacy aims at providing audiences with the skills necessary to perceive media messages correctly; and the ability to create new messages over time. Improved media literacy skills would help reinforce the audience's conscious ability to decode media, to express themselves comfortably and participate in their social lives actively and creatively. In the RTSC approach, the importance of media literacy is defined through the notions of "control" and "discipline" ([www.rtuk.gov.tr](http://www.rtuk.gov.tr)).

According to the RTSC, one of the important reasons for media literacy course to be included in the elementary school curriculum is the consensus among experts and educators on mass media's negative impact on children, notably television, Internet and radio. In "The Platform to Stop Violence" established in 2004 within the structure of the Ministry of State and which represents public enterprises, non-governmental organizations and universities, the RTSC suggested for the first time that the media literacy course should be included in the curriculum of the elementary schools. For this purpose, the Council contacted with MNE. In 2006, the findings of the RTSC's research into children's attitude toward watching television highlighted the importance of media literacy.

At the 2006-2007 terms, the MNE added the elective course to the curriculum for the pilot schools at five cities selected by the decision of Ministry of National Education - Board of Education (2006). With this decision it is stated that media literacy course in pilot schools were taught at the 7<sup>th</sup> grades of primary schools. According to this decision, the kit on media literacy contained only handbook for teachers. In other words, there was no student book. The RTSC explained its reason in the way that is to not accustom students to memorize but to help them think freely and express themselves and to make the media literacy course different from other classic courses. But, in practice, students as well as teachers have certain difficulties in this manner. In our research conducted in Ankara at 2009-2010 terms, teachers reported inconveniences in conducting the lesson due to the lack of student's handbook for media literacy (Asrak Hasdemir and Demirel, 2010). The curriculum and textbook of media literacy course had certain changes and new curriculum

and a new student book were prepared in 2013. It was declared that new curriculum and new textbook would be in circulation in 2014-2015 education term. Nowadays, there is a course book prepared for students, in that sense, difficulties stemming from the lack of student's handbook can be overcome. But there can be another problem: there is no teacher's book in this new programme.

As a consequence of the cooperation between the RTSC and the MNE-BE at the beginning of 2000s, the cadre to educate teachers in media literacy course was formed. The BE decided that classroom teachers who had graduated from communication faculties or communication high schools and who work in the system of National Education as well as teachers social sciences could teach media literacy course. This is another problematic issue in teaching media literacy course. There are only 812 classroom teachers graduated from communication faculties or high schools in the cadres of Ministry of Education (Sütçü, 2011). This means that media literacy course all over the country are taught by teachers whose education is not directly related with communication. In her study on the implementation of media literacy course in Ankara, Toker Erdoğan states that most of the teachers who were interviewed recommended that this course should be taught by teachers graduated from faculty of communication. Also some teachers underlined the importance of "educator training program", i.e., training of trainers for media literacy (Toker Erdoğan, 2010:131-132).

Before 2014-2015 term, the media literacy course could be elected by the students at the 6<sup>th</sup>, the 7<sup>th</sup> or the 8<sup>th</sup> grades of primary schools, in other words, these students could take this course only once during these years. Nowadays, the students of the 7<sup>th</sup> or the 8<sup>th</sup> grades can elect this course, but the course duration is same: 40 minutes a week. In that sense, time allocated to media literacy is not sufficient to elaborate issues augmented over the time in relation to media. In our research conducted in Ankara at 2009-2010 term, one of the main complaints of the teachers is lack of time to analyze the issues specified in the program and also to make available student to create their own media products. For example, as stated by Goodman, "[t]aking a video camera into the community as a regular method for teaching and learning gives kids a critical lens through which they can explore the world around them" (2003:3), this type of learning is important for critical media literacy.

The "elective" status of the course has still survived and it has continued to create another problem. In practice, schools rather than the students determines which elective courses can be taught for each year.

When regarding the implementations of media literacy course before 2014-2015 term, it is detected that whole of the program was prepared with the aim to protect children and preserve certain values. This approach was criticized by scholars and researchers in different respect. For example, Gencil Bek stated that critical media literacy education should be focused on citizen's consciousness and responsibility instead of protective approach (2011). Another scholar, İnal insisted on respecting of children's rights, more specifically rights in the Convention of the Rights of the Child in the preparation of media products to strengthen the position of children (2011:423).

Beside these, handbook for “new” media, as a more referred medium by youth, was strongly recommended to be included into the syllabus. And, at the end, the syllabus and the course book were reviewed in 2013. Some titles of the units separated for different media in the teacher’s book of the media literacy course during 2007-2014 are as follows: Two separate units are allocated to the medium television, “Television” and “Family, Child and TV” (13 class hours) whereas one unit for “Radio” (3 class hours), one unit for “Newspaper and Magazine (3 class hours) and also one unit was allocated for “Internet” (6 class hours). When regarding units of student’s book which is taught in 2014-2015 education term, issues and practices related with traditional as well as new media are distributed in all units. It is seen that the last unit is especially reserved for handling issues and practices related with new media. The title of the student’s book can be translated as follows (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2014):

- “Media as the medium of entertainment”,
- “I ask question directed to media”- Media as the medium to have information,
- “Let’s think about It”-Media as the medium to have information,
- “My media”- Media as the sphere of participation.

Despite certain problems and inconveniences, the media literacy course, as a whole, can provide opportunities for child to be critical and to have information about new media. But the number of children taking this course was not high during 2012-2013 term as well as 2013-2014. Beside media literacy course, in the curriculum, there are some courses in which issues related with new media literacy are taught. Also the number of students taking some of these courses are not too high (see table 3 ).

**Table 3. Number of all students taking elective courses, media literacy and other related courses**

Years	Elective courses 5th-8th grades	Media literacy 6th-8th grades	Computer 5th-8th grades	Communication Technologies 7th-8th grades
2012-2103	7.936.006	624.809	3.131	1.687.715
2013-2014	5.960.826	310.565	10.688	328.362

**Source: The Statistics of the Ministry of National Education<sup>2</sup>**

Binark pointed out that “only access does not solve the digital divide: there is a literacy divide such as technical skills, knowledge skills etc.” (Binark, 2014). To overcome difficulties stemming from literacy divide, children should gain basic digital

<sup>2</sup> These detailed statistics are not included in the general statistics of the Ministry of National Education, published every year (Ministry of National Education, 2006). The special statistics on media literacy course and other courses related with new media, which are elaborated in this article are asked from the Ministry for this study.

skills at home and especially in their school. EU Kids Online team also underlined the importance of school curriculum to provide safer new media environment for child and youth. They recommended to “[i]ntegrate online safety awareness and digital skills across the curriculum”; (O’Neill and Staksrud, 2014:4).

In the report prepared by UNICEF on digital future of children and youth, the responsibility of government on the issue of access to internet is stated as follows,

Still, lower rates of computer and Internet usage as compared to other European countries, and persistent gender and location-based digital divides means that the Turkish government must continue to pursue and create initiatives to optimize access to ICT among its citizens (UNICEF, 2011:27).

Other side of the coin of child and new media relationship is certain attempts to control communication through new media. With the growing popularity of the internet within the last decades, new issues, such as safer use of internet, have contentious nature and were closely related with different agents of any given society. From public institutions to individual users, the safer use of internet is highly concerned at the national as well as international levels.

In Turkey “safer internet service” was titled and presented by Information and Communication Technologies Authority (ICTA). ICTA established its policy on the basis of the Regulation on Consumers Rights in Electronic Communication Sector, and Rules and Procedures determined by ICTA in accordance with this Regulation. By ICTA, it was announced that the Safer Internet Service aims to protect children and youth from harmful content on the internet. This service consists of two profiles called family and child profile. In addition, ICTA stated that this service is optional and free of charge. This service has been launched since November 2011 in Turkey. Although ICTA declared that this service considered the liberties of internet users, it was strongly criticized by some NGOs, academicians and experts, and it was treated as central filtering practice<sup>3</sup>.

One of the problematic issues regarding internet usage is Law No:5651. The Turkish government enacted this law in May 2007, entitled Regulation of Publications on the Internet and Suppression of Crimes Committed by means of Such Publication, in short, it is known as Internet Law. But this law was strongly criticized since it served as the basis of censorship and of “mass blocking websites. In the study on this law, Akdeniz mentions certain deficiencies of this law and purported that,

If kept in its present form, the law should be abolished. It will be argued that the government should commission a major public inquiry to develop a new policy which is truly designed to protect children from harmful Internet content while respecting freedom of speech, and the rights of Turkish adults to access and consume any type of legal Internet content. (Akdeniz, 2010:3).

One of the important NGO, Alternative Informatics Association (AIA) deals with different frames for media as well as new media literacy and insist on free, equal and

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<sup>3</sup> For a detailed information, see, [www.alternatifbilisim.org](http://www.alternatifbilisim.org)

fundamental right of access to Internet, and importance of new media literacy to have benefits of new media environment as well as beware risks (Alternatif Bilişim Derneği, 2014). For these purposes, new media literacy training programs should be designed by taking into consideration different characteristics and needs of the different segments of the society. The curriculum development workshop is one of the activities of AIA with the collaboration of UNICEF and it was held in Ankara, on 11 April, 2014. Within this workshop, three different curriculums of new media literacy were planned by regarding different needs of children, adolescence and adults.

### **As a Conclusion**

The UN Convention on Rights of the Child (1989) is one of the international legal documents dealing with the relationship between media and children, as well as children's communication rights. For example, article 13/1 of the Convention declares the "right to freedom of expression" through any kind of "media of the child's choice", while article 17 emphasizes that "States Parties recognize the important function performed by the mass media and shall ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources". According to article 42 of Convention on the Rights of the Children the state has the responsibility to make the Convention widely known by adults and children (UNICEF, 2000: 94-100).

As one of the state parties to the UNCRC, Turkey has an obligation to protect and promote children's communication rights as set forth in the UN Convention on Rights of the Child. However, Turkey's approach to fulfilling this obligation appears contradictory. Initiatives that aim to provide effective usage of the ICT in teaching programmes, such as the "Fatih Project" designed for the primary and secondary education levels, clashes with legal restrictions on the usage of new media. Furthermore, the "Safer Internet Service" in Turkey, which is set up to protect young audiences from harmful content, is generally treated as a central filtering practice.

Media Literacy course might be an important means for creating enabling children, youth and even parents to be safely enjoy the opportunities of new media environments. Raising awareness should be integral to critical new media literacy education. New media literacy could support children and youth to find certain methods when faced with situations that create inconveniences and problems.

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