



Teaching Communication in Schools. Case: UTPL-CAJE-Más Periodismo Communication Club

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Abstract. The beginning of journalism clubs in Loja took place in the nineties of the last century. They embraced the potential of the media as a tool for teaching, skills development and participation in public opinion. Today, after the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic where students self-taught themselves to develop instrumental competences for audiovisual creation, the aim is to support the formation of critical skills through project-based learning, in a current version called communication clubs. This article reports on the educational project, its characteristics, achievements and future possibilities.

Keywords: journalism, media literacy, secondary education, young people

1 Introduction

The media is undergoing a transition from conventional TV, radio and print media to digital platforms, where everyone can intervene and contribute to public opinion. However, the social networks that emerge in the context of cybercommunication and that offered an opportunity to democratize speech. It also serves to propagate information that is poorly contextualized and to amplify rumours, thus leaving aside the possibilities of informational and audiovisual creations that enhance identity.

In order to confront the depreciation and recover the media's commitment to society, it is proposed to multiply media and information literacy practices in order to form competencies in audiences and thus contribute with a critical vision to the news.

Based on this reality and on the evidence that indicates that it is better to intervene at an early age to form critical competencies for media consumption [1], the potential of students in the upper years of the schools was identified; these are the children who received virtual classes at the beginning of COVID-19, who acquired instrumental skills on their own, and are able to articulate their knowledge in digital communication. Therefore, the aim is to bring the training that young people receive through dialogue and collaborative creation in youth workshops on journalism and communication closer to them.

What is a club? According to the Real Academia Española de la Lengua [2]. It is a 'society founded by a group of people with common interests and dedicated to activities

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of different kinds, mainly recreational, sporting or cultural'. That is, a youth communication club corresponds to a group of young people with an interest in journalism, audiovisual production and other areas of information sciences who meet to learn and share. The communication club meetings are guided by tutors, professionals, and researchers who accompany them from basic learning to small achievements that are disseminated through local media and social networks.

The predecessor of the communication clubs are the journalism clubs, which were intended to provide 'an early approach to the profession, its virtualities and also its complexities. Moreover, they put the writer in front of an audience, with all the responsibility that this entails' [3].

The communication clubs are aimed at 'school children, who are looking for something interesting to know and who are at a decision-making stage; the club helps them to understand what 21st century journalism is all about' [4]. Previous studies demonstrate the relevance and effectiveness of journalism and communication clubs by pointing out that they achieve 'greater mastery of narrative genres, followed by discursive and poetic (understood as the search for appropriate ways to communicate) and to a lesser extent argumentative. It is emphasized that writing maintains communicative vitality' [5].

On the other hand, the journalism and communication clubs

are designed to exercise the development of cognitive skills at an early age. Thinking and researching in an emphatic way about recurring societal problems invites them to manifest those skills that are not developed during high school, but long after, when they enter a university career; therefore their implementation on a progressive scale will shape and guide these skills [6].

There is a direct relationship between freedom of the press, quality of life and improved governance, which is why, in the face of the acute problems that Ecuadorian society is experiencing (violence, corruption, low production), it is believed that fostering communication helps to create better environments for greater exercise of freedom of expression and communication rights.

1.1 Background

The Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja, in Ecuador (UTPL) promotes spaces for collaboration and social links to serve young people, some initiatives are related to digital culture. On the other hand, local organizations working on journalism issues, such as the CAJE Youth Support Centre and the 'More Journalism' Foundation, join forces to train communication skills in adolescents and young people to prevent misinformation and the weakening of democracy.

Based on the above, the Communication Clubs project was conceived in the Loja and Cariamanga cantons of the province of Loja, to strengthen information skills and contribute to local development through the promotion of creativity as a means of sustained progress.

A team of teachers, on the basis of an agreement with the Zonal Directorate of the Ministry of Education of Ecuador, convened high school students to organize working groups. Every Thursday, expert teachers from UTPL and the foundations Más Periodismo and CAJE gave workshops. Students also acted as tutors for the participants. The

topics covered focused on the creation of audiovisual content, from conception to production and distribution. At the end of the intervention, participants will be able to create content or communication pieces articulated to sustainable development, freedom of expression and citizen participation.

1.2 Media and Information Literacy

The conceptual frame of reference for communication clubs is media and information literacy, which is essential in the digital age. Students enhance their natural skills, navigate the internet judiciously, interpret news and discern between reliable and unreliable sources, and enable them to consume information critically and participate actively in society.

In a world where information flows constantly through multiple channels, the ability to understand, analyse and use that information becomes a fundamental skill. Media and information literacy in education, in addition to teaching how to use technological tools, also encourages critical and reflective thinking about how media impacts our lives and the use of social media in learning [7].

1.3 Objectives

The general objective of the communication clubs project was to contribute to the formation of informational competencies in high school students in the cantons of Loja, and Cariamanga for the creation and critical consumption of audiovisual media content and social networks; and to increase the understanding and practice of freedom of expression as a basis for democratic and peaceful coexistence.

The specific objectives: 1) To encourage respect for people and highlight humanistic values in the creation of audiovisual content, 2) To share knowledge on audiovisual production to address social problems and participate in public opinion, 3) To contribute content to the social media in Zone 7 of Ecuador.

2 Methodology

The methodology of the intervention responds to the pedagogical strategies of project-based learning (PBL) and service learning [9]. Communication Club meetings were held every week, with talks on audiovisual production, teamwork to achieve products (challenges), and interaction with the media. This report uses a quantitative methodology through a survey applied to the participants. The qualitative evaluation scales were constructed from the study 'Media competence and media literacy needs of Spanish teachers and families' [8]. A Google form was used. The data were processed in SPSS software, version 22.

3 Results

The statistics of the workshops held in the communication club, between November 2023 and January 2024, are: 52 participants, 25 in Loja, 27 in Cariamanga. 9

participating schools, 6 in Loja and 3 in Cariamanga, as well as students from the Higher Technological Institute of Cariamanga. 20 academic hours of effective work. 9 workshops carried out. 10 teacher trainers. 15 students from the social communication career accompanied the execution of the workshops.

Primer Taller Clubes de Comunicación

Hoy se dio inicio con el primer taller de los clubes de Comunicación, donde varios estudiantes de diferentes Instituciones Educativas de Loja fueron partícipes de una iniciativa liderada por Fundación CAJE en alianza con la UTPL – Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja, Zona 7 del Ministerio de Educación y Fundación más periodismo.

El objetivo principal es fortalecer los conocimientos académicos de los jóvenes que nos permita enfocarnos en el desarrollo de habilidades blandas, esenciales para insertar en un mundo cada vez más interconectado. La empatía, la comunicación efectiva, el trabajo en equipo y la resolución de problemas son habilidades que no solo enriquecerán sus vidas académicas, sino que también los prepararán para enfrentar los desafíos del mundo real.

<https://fundacioncaje.org/primer-taller-clubes-de-comunicacion/>

Boris Sarango
@israelsarango

Hoy trabajamos con el Club de Comunicación que está conformado por estudiantes de colegios de Loja.

Realizamos algunas prácticas de entrevistas en vivo.

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<https://twitter.com/israelsarango/status/1743074751814234394>

Carreras de Comunicación UTPL
@ComUTPL

Esta semana nuestro #ClubdeComunicación en Cariamanga aprendió sobre la producción de contenidos audiovisuales digitales 🎥📱

Un esfuerzo conjunto de nuestra carrera, @FundacionCaje @MasPeriodismo_ y la Zonal 7 de @minedu.ec

#SomosComunicaciónUTPL

Tú y 4 más

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<https://twitter.com/ComUTPL/status/1735762117125345373>

La Hora

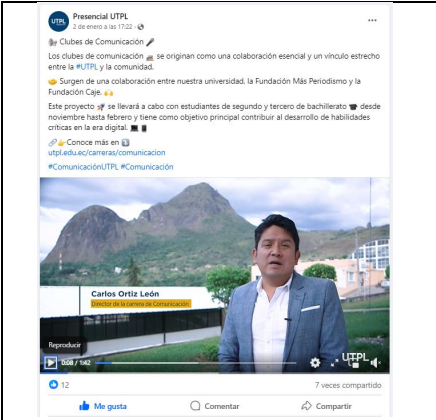
NOTICIAS · PROVINCIAS · OPINIÓN · SERVICIOS · PRI

Clubes de Comunicación buscan formar jóvenes críticos

noviembre 13, 2023

Fundación CAJE Clubes de Comunicación entregó diplomas a estudiantes de segundo y tercer año de bachillerato en las ciudades de Loja y Cariamanga.

<https://www.lahora.com.ec/loja/clubes-de-comunicacion-buscan-formar-jovenes-criticos/>



https://www.facebook.com/utplpresencial?locale=es_LA





Fig. 1. Photographic evidence from the communication club

The results of the survey allow us to identify that:

- The average age of the participants of 16.5 years.
- 70% of the participants were female, 30% male.
- 100 live in a marginal urban area of the cities of Loja and Cariamanga.
- 40% of the participants have parents with higher education.
- On a qualitative scale, with 1 being the least satisfied and 5 the most satisfied, all workshops received ratings between 4 and 5.
- The participants report that they acquired a lot of knowledge for audiovisual creation (Fig. 2).
- After the workshops, they consider that they have high skills in identifying misinformation and that social networks have little influence on their performance.

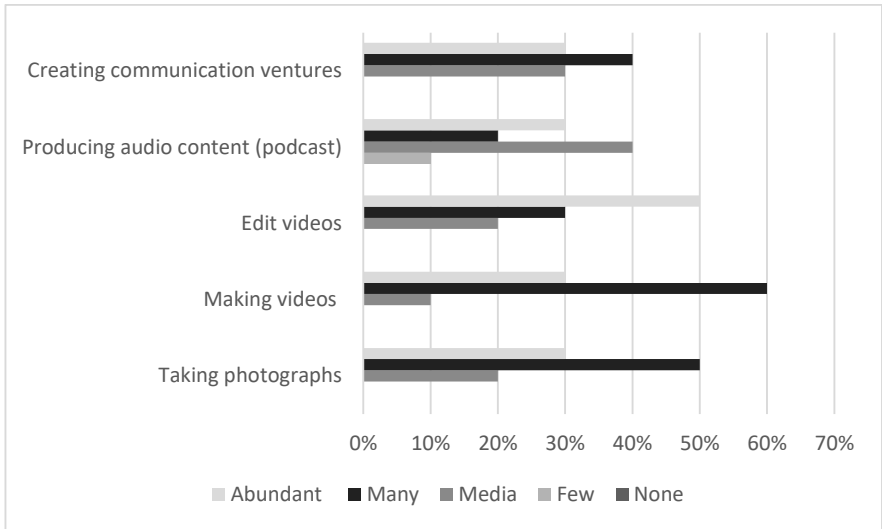


Fig. 2. Knowledge, practices and possibilities

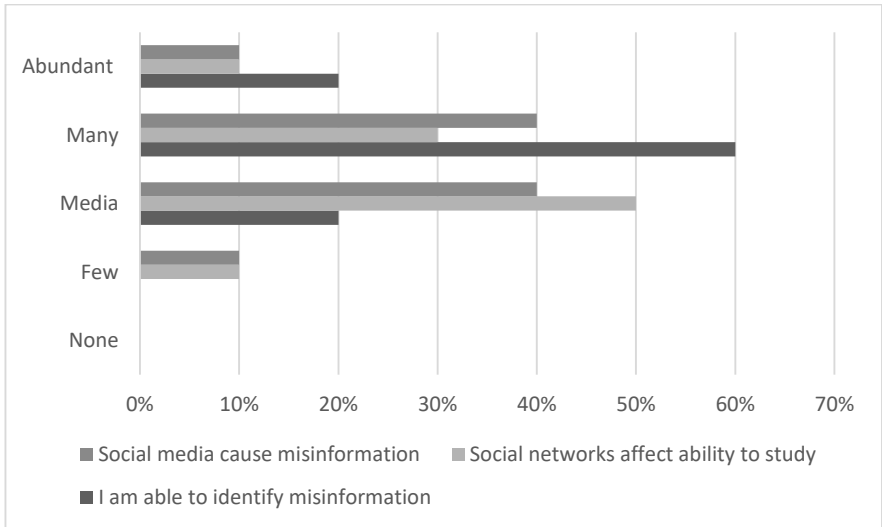


Fig. 3. Appreciations

Among the testimonials received, anonymously, are the following:

‘A communication club, for me, is an excellent initiative to foster effective communication skills and build a positive image. During the club we have developed a space where all members can socialize, improve their active listening skills and learn how to convey messages clearly and persuasively. The club not only

benefits its members individually, but can also have a positive impact on the wider community by promoting more effective and empathetic communication’.

‘It provided me with opportunities to learn, develop skills, build professional networks, and offers an environment of support and camaraderie where you can grow both personally and professionally, and it also helped me de-stress. The communication club has been a great addition to my knowledge and stability, because in reporting you need to not be afraid to speak in front of a lot of people, thanks to this club I am starting to let go of my panic to express myself in front of other people’.

4 Conclusions

The implementation of the communication clubs project, in the first stage of intervention, achieved the proposed objectives. On the basis of the evidence and testimonies of the participants, the contribution to the formation of informational competences in high school students in the cantons of Loja and Cariamanga for the creation and critical consumption of audiovisual media is shown.

The project will continue towards the creation of more and better content, through project-based learning. A version of constructivist methodology in education, to share through social media, and build a broad base towards the formation of favourable environments for more people [9].

At the macro level, the following impacts should be mentioned.

Social impact: in addition to improving young people's capacities for critical media consumption, creative solutions were contributed to the social debate.

Scientific impact: sharing the results in academic events in the field of communication sciences.

Political impact: contributing to the SDGs through local public opinion.

It is worth mentioning that in the 1990s, thanks to the support of educational institutions and the newspaper *El Comercio de Ecuador*, in Loja, the CAJE Foundation approached schools and created the first spaces to propose messages from the perspective of the members of the clubs. There were also other experiences such as the voice-over seminars and radio workshops given by the *Nuestros Jóvenes* Foundation, and the opening of the Communication Degree at the National University of Loja, which among its first actions linked CIESPAL to Loja and shared knowledge among the community.

Today, faced with the risks of disinformation, after Covid-19 and the discussions on the regulation of content on the Internet, the UTPL's Communication Department and the CAJE and *Más Periodismo* foundations are harmonizing their actions with the re-launch of journalism clubs. This time as communication clubs to strengthen dialogue and civic values in the social platforms available on the network.

The aim is to continue to contribute to democracy through critical interventions by high school students, in an environment where local and global communications are close, so that media and information competence is urgent for an authentic humanistic communication. It is up to those responsible to continue and improve the impact they have achieved through more leaders who serve the country and Ibero-America [10].

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