Media Education in Higher Education Institutions in Ecuador

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Abstract

This paper examines media literacy education in higher education institutions in Ecuador, addressing its impact on the teaching-learning process and the development of critical skills in students. The text undertakes an analysis of the evolution of media literacy education, emphasizing its role in the development of cognitive, intellectual, and ethical skills. Furthermore, it offers a comprehensive perspective on how institutions of higher education can adapt their pedagogical approaches to promote media literacy and prepare students for a dynamic digital environment. The study underscores the necessity to cultivate critical, reflective, and communicative competencies in the utilization of media tools, thereby advocating for comprehensive training for prospective professionals.

Keywords: Media Education, Higher Education, Critical Skills, Digital Literacy, Educational Technologies.

Introduction

In the contemporary world, characterized by incessant technological advancements and an abundance of digital media, media education has emerged as a pivotal component within the domain of higher education. In this environment, higher education institutions must confront the imperative to adapt their pedagogical approaches, ensuring that their students do not merely receive information, but rather evolve into proactive and critical contributors within the digital landscape.

The term "media education" signifies the capacity to interpret, analyze, evaluate, and create media content in a critical and responsible manner. This skill is vital for the development of cognitive, intellectual, and ethical competencies that enable students to interact effectively in today's complex digital world. The cultivation of media literacy in students has been demonstrated to facilitate not only the adept use of technological tools, but also to enhance their capacity for critical thinking and informed decision-making.

Media education encompasses more than merely acquiring technical skills; it involves a comprehensive understanding of the operation of media, their impact on reality perception, and their ethical and responsible utilization. Consequently, media education emerges as a pivotal resource for cultivating essential competencies in university students, who must be equipped to

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navigate an increasingly intricate and evolving digital landscape.

In recent decades, there has been a notable advancement in the incorporation of media education into curricula. A shift has occurred from an approach that prioritized technical learning in the use of technologies to a more comprehensive vision that acknowledges media literacy as a cross-cutting skill that is imperative for the all-encompassing development of students. This transformation is indicative of a growing recognition of the need to educate critical and responsible citizens who can analyze, interpreting, and generating media content in an ethical manner.

In Ecuador, the integration of media education within higher education institutions poses unique challenges. Institutions must modify their teaching methods to include effective media literacy strategies, ensuring that students learn not only how to use digital technologies, but also how to understand their influence on society and their personal and professional growth. Furthermore, it is imperative that educators undergo continuous professional development in media competencies to effectively counsel students on the critical and ethical utilization of media.

A critical component of media education is its capacity to cultivate analytical thinking skills. It is imperative for students to cultivate the ability to interrogate the information they receive, discern reliable sources of information, and critically evaluate the messages to which they are exposed. This is of particular importance in the digital age, where information is abundant but not always authentic or accurate. Consequently, media education cultivates not only technologically proficient users but also critical citizens who possess the ability to discern between legitimate information and misinformation.

This article analyzes the current state of media education in higher education institutions in Ecuador, investigating its impact on the development of critical skills and suggesting ways to improve it. A thorough theoretical review and contextual analysis are employed to provide a comprehensive overview of the role of media education in university education, emphasizing its relevance for cultivating a critical and responsible citizenry in today's digital environment.

Towards a Digital Age

The advent of digitization has permeated all echelons of contemporary society, precipitating profound transformations within the educational sector. Fedorov (2004) asserts that, given the prevailing circumstances, it is imperative that university graduates, irrespective of their academic discipline, acquire the competencies to function effectively in the digital environment. Consequently, the development of media education has emerged as a pivotal component of contemporary higher education.

From a contemporary standpoint, media education is conceptualized as a multifaceted process that encompasses the varied utilization of media resources in a comprehensive manner, encompassing both textual and digital media for personal and professional development. It also includes understanding media production and dissemination processes, along with the promotion of analytical skills for the interpretation and critical evaluation of their content.

Concurrently, the conventional model of university education, firmly entrenched in the classical paradigm, exhibits a mounting incongruity with the contemporary demands of students, who are increasingly influenced by media and cognitive interaction. Conventional education systems prioritize explicit and static knowledge, presented in decontextualized teaching modules. This pedagogical approach often results in ineffective assimilation due to a lack of understanding of

the situational context in which that knowledge is applied.

These pedagogical approaches prioritize the transmission of explicit and declarative knowledge. This phenomenon occurs in university institutions where knowledge is transmitted in a static manner, resulting in ineffective knowledge transfer.

Ferrés (2015) contends that the conventional university paradigm constitutes a model of teacher-student interaction in which the teacher is regarded as an authority figure in a specific scientific domain. Pupils are obliged to attend in-person classes, subsequently followed by evaluations. The fundamental objective of these evaluations is to assess the pupils' comprehension of the subject matter. Consequently, it is imperative for academic institutions to formulate a comprehensive strategic plan that fosters effective communication and information exchange between students and faculty members.

Media Literacy in Higher Education

In the contemporary higher education landscape, universities are tasked with the responsibility of evolving into virtual network hubs that facilitate the integration and dissemination of knowledge. The learning environment they create must encompass industry, business structures, professional experts, and university researchers. The dynamic nature of this environment, which is sensitive to both external and internal changes, must be considered. Consequently, academic institutions are no longer able to position themselves as the custodians of knowledge. Conversely, they are required to proactively establish partnerships with commercial entities, scientific institutions, non-profit organizations, educational providers, and other universities.

The digital age in higher education is characterized by the emergence of meta-universities, which can be defined as public systems of online platforms. In these virtual spaces, educators utilize innovative methods to convey theoretical and practical knowledge to students, enhancing the efficacy and accessibility of education. According to Fueyo (2015), in a university of this type, individual participants and groups collaborate to establish and maintain an alternative digital communication infrastructure that facilitates the creation of alternative digital platforms (spaces).

Digital educational technologies are profoundly altering the concept of literacy. J. Potter offers a characterization of these changes through the conceptual framework of "media literacy," defining it as "a set of perspectives through which we expose ourselves to the media and interpret the meaning of the messages we encounter." Consequently, a culture predicated on participation is formed. Its most evident manifestations are communication and interaction on social networks. There are opportunities for unrestricted and gratis access to information. The proliferation of content creation and dissemination has led to a significant increase in the number of users with whom content can be shared.

Media literacy is characterized by a set of general competencies that transcend specific disciplines. These competencies necessitate systematic and critical thinking, in addition to information management and effective communication skills.

In order for media literacy to function effectively in higher education, students must possess the following competencies related to the utilization of digital multimedia technologies. This assertion is supported by Potter's (2004) theoretical framework on literacy, which encompasses the following elements:

1. The capacity to retrieve information from the internet, encompassing the capability to

download diverse data types, is a crucial skill.

2. The ability to navigate digital networks and comprehend internet usage strategies is paramount.

3. The classification skills of an individual are defined by their capacity to methodically organize information according to predefined categorization schemes. These categorization schemes encompass various dimensions of organization, including but not limited to problems, genres, and topics.

4. Integrative skills are defined as the capacity to compare and select different types of information related to multimodal content.

5. Evaluative and reflective skills refer to the ability to evaluate the quality, relevance, objectivity, and usefulness of information, adopting a critical stance.

6. Communication skills are defined as the ability to communicate and collaborate, express oneself through media, participate in online educational interactions, and comply with ethical standards of communication.

7. Creative and instrumental competencies are defined as the ability to generate one's own content in multimodal formats, create web pages, and transform pre-existing content into new forms of expression.

In the context of digitization, the question of the continued relevance of analog (traditional) education remains salient. This prompts further inquiry into the potential replacement of analog education by digital education. Advocates of digitization in education posit a comprehensive dissolution of analog education, proposing its replacement with its digital counterpart.

Wissema's (2016) assertion posits that online courses are inadequate in cultivating the intellectual search skills that are imperative for a graduate's development. These skills, it is argued, can only be acquired through live educational interaction and direct contact.

Consequently, both traditional and novel educational technologies are poised to coexist.

Social Media and Education

In the contemporary digital era, social media platforms have been integrated into various educational settings, thereby transforming the way teaching and learning occur. Initially developed for interpersonal interaction, these networks have evolved into valuable tools that facilitate learning, the exchange of ideas, and collaboration in academia. Nevertheless, their integration into educational settings offers both benefits and challenges.

According to Moran (2011), social networks possess two fundamental features that render them distinctive: their capacity to establish connections among individuals across the globe and the rapid and extensive dissemination of information. These qualities render them an ideal medium for collaborative learning, as they facilitate instantaneous access to information, engagement in discussions, and collaborative work on projects, unencumbered by geographical constraints.

As Barbero (2003) notes, "digital social networks are emerging as tools of considerable importance that continue to expand their use for educational purposes" (p. 123). This statement underscores the notion that social media ought not be regarded exclusively as a medium for entertainment, but rather as an environment conducive to the cultivation of critical, creative, and communicative skills. These platforms offer students the opportunity to create educational

content, share materials, give presentations, and hone their communication skills in the digital environment.

Conversely, Sáez (2019) underscores the potential risks associated with the integration of social media within educational contexts. The unrestrained freedom that users possess on social media platforms has the potential to result in criticism, unconventional behavior, and hostile or aggressive comments within the digital environment. The aforementioned reality underscores the necessity for educational institutions to institute explicit guidelines that promote conscientious and secure utilization of social media, thereby cultivating an atmosphere of mutual respect and collaborative learning.

From an educational perspective, social media offers numerous advantages, including but not limited to:

Access to educational material: Digital platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and Telegram provide students with access to a plethora of educational resources in various formats, including videos, infographics, and interactive documents.

Collaborative learning: The creation of online study groups, active engagement in discussions, and collaborative work on academic projects, whether in real time or at a subsequent point in time, are all possible for students.

Digital skills development: The utilization of social media has been demonstrated to foster the development of technological, communication, and creative competencies, which are imperative for academic and professional achievement.

Active participation: Social media platforms provide students with avenues to articulate their perspectives, disseminate their experiences, and proactively engage in their own learning process.

However, its implementation also poses significant challenges that must be addressed in a meticulous manner. These include the potential for misinformation, access to inappropriate content, and the tendency for students to adopt patterns of excessive or harmful use of these platforms. Therefore, it is imperative that educators assume the roles of guides and facilitators, assisting students in developing the capacity to utilize social media in a critical and responsible manner.

Academic institutions should promote the strategic implementation of social media as educational instruments, incorporating activities that facilitate analytical thinking, creativity, and effective communication. It is imperative to establish explicit guidelines that govern its utilization and safeguard students from potential hazards.

Presently, an examination is underway to determine the efficacy of social media in facilitating learning, with a focus on its benefits and challenges. The text goes on to suggest methods for safe and effective use, ensuring that students acquire digital skills in a positive and responsible learning environment.

Media Education in Ecuadorian Universities

Education and universal access to information and communication technologies are rights established in the constitution of the Republic of Ecuador (2008). However, Ecuador, akin to other Latin American nations, is confronted with the challenge of providing a quality education that is suboptimal, as asserted by Basdresch (2001). This predicament is further compounded by

the inadequate preparation of teachers, which impedes the effective execution of the teaching-learning process.

Education continues to represent a significant challenge for Ecuador, despite the implementation of measures such as the expansion of access to higher education and the establishment of universities in various regions of the country, which has led to a substantial increase in student participation. These changes are the result of the impact of an increasingly dynamic society that is open to the digital and knowledge society. In the context of higher education, it is imperative that institutions of learning integrate digital technologies into their curricula. Both faculty members and students must be granted unrestricted access to the Internet and digital collections of library resources, which must be updated on a regular basis. It is imperative for both educators and students to cultivate media literacy competencies. Duart (2011) posits that a primary objective of the university project should be to substantially enhance the media component of instruction, develop a diverse array of digital versions of the academic disciplines, employ distance education technologies, and motivate students to utilize the educational resources accessible on open access online platforms.

Media education in Ecuadorian universities necessitates a commitment and responsibility from all educational actors to effect a transformation in pedagogical approaches. This transformation is predicated on a curriculum model that endeavors to cultivate literacy through the medium of the media as a teaching process. The objective is to capture the attention of young people, who are regarded as users, by engaging in creative and critical participation both within and outside the classroom.

It is imperative that both students and teachers promote media education, demonstrate a willingness to adopt digital educational technologies, utilize social networks in educational processes, and engage in communication through the Internet. These phenomena should be evaluated in a sociological survey conducted by university educational institutions.

Aguaded (2005) posits that university education in the media context must be relevant, with the media integrated into educational processes, reflecting on them, and encouraging critical thinking in the educational community. In order to execute this task, it is imperative to employ an experiential pedagogical approach, with the objective of cultivating students' capacity for critical discernment regarding the information they engage with. This imperative arises from our contemporary milieu, wherein information is frequently subject to distortion, a phenomenon that has the potential to impinge upon the rights to freedom of expression. This is due to the pervasive dissemination of unfiltered and critically unanalyzed information.

In this scenario, it is imperative to strengthen new skills in university-level educational institutions. The challenge lies in the training of university students to be not only competent professionals, but also conscious citizens. These students must be capable of dealing with a vast amount of information, autonomously discerning the relevance and appropriateness of content, and making responsible decisions among the many alternatives available. (Valerio-Ureña & Valenzuela-González, 2011). This process necessitates the development of curricula that incorporate media literacy-related subjects in a cross-cutting manner, with the objective of enhancing civic skills.

It is imperative to acknowledge the necessity of research to address the role of universities in cultivating critical citizens in the contemporary context of technological access to information. Consequently, several inquiries emerge that necessitate further examination in subsequent

projects: A critical inquiry into the university's efficacy in fulfilling its role in media literacy is imperative. A further inquiry would be to determine whether the university fosters citizen empowerment that is facilitated by the media. To address these issues, it would be relevant to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the activities carried out in the university setting.

Conclusions

In the contemporary digital age, media education within higher education institutions in Ecuador has become an imperative. Students must cultivate critical thinking, communication skills, and ethical principles to navigate the current media landscape. While social media offers certain advantages as an educational resource, it also poses certain dangers that must be managed appropriately. It is incumbent upon educational institutions to establish explicit guidelines that promote the ethical and responsible use of these platforms.

Media literacy is a multifaceted concept that extends beyond the mere utilization of technological tools. It encompasses a critical comprehension of media content, the cultivation of analytical thinking skills, and the capacity to produce and disseminate information in an ethical manner. Educators function as facilitators of media literacy, and their sustained training is imperative to ensure that they can effectively guide students in the critical use of media.

It is imperative for academic institutions to recalibrate their curriculum, incorporating media competencies across various disciplines. This initiative ensures that students are not merely consumers of digital information, but also adept at its critical analysis and responsible production. Media education has been demonstrated to foster civic skills by instructing students in the examination of information, the identification of reliable sources, and the formation of well-informed decisions.

When managed correctly, social media can transform into collaborative learning environments where students do not merely receive information, but also actively participate in its creation and dissemination. It is imperative that educational institutions acknowledge the impact of digital technologies on student life and adopt a pedagogical approach that fosters their critical and ethical use.

It is imperative that students be educated as critical and responsible citizens, equipped to evaluate the information they receive through the media and use technologies ethically and productively. This article underscores the significance of incorporating media literacy into the university curriculum, equipping students with the necessary skills to navigate a multifaceted and perpetually evolving digital landscape.

It is imperative that academic institutions not only integrate digital technologies into their operations but also foster a reflective and ethical approach to their utilization. It is imperative that students develop the ability to question the information they consume, discern biases, and critically evaluate sources. By cultivating these competencies, students will become responsible consumers and creators of media content.

In such a scenario, educators assume a pivotal role, functioning as guides and facilitators, fostering critical thinking and autonomous learning. Furthermore, it is imperative that they receive continuous training in media skills to ensure their ability to adapt to the constant changes in the digital environment.

The implementation of policies within educational institutions that govern the use of social media and digital tools is imperative. These guidelines are designed to provide clear guidance to

promote the ethical, safe, and responsible use of digital platforms, thereby safeguarding students and teachers.

This analysis underscores the notion that media education should not be regarded as a mere alternative, but rather as an imperative that is indispensable in the 21st century. Educational institutions bear a responsibility to cultivate citizens who are critical, reflective, and ethical, who are capable of utilizing technologies effectively and responsibly. The integration of media literacy training across the curriculum is imperative to cultivate students' comprehensive growth and development.

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